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MASTER OF
SUPERNATURAL
TERROR

METEOR GODS

THE SACRED
STONES FROM
OUTER SPACE

FAKERS UNMASKED

FOREST BOY AND
OTHER IMPOSTORS

STRANGE DEATHS

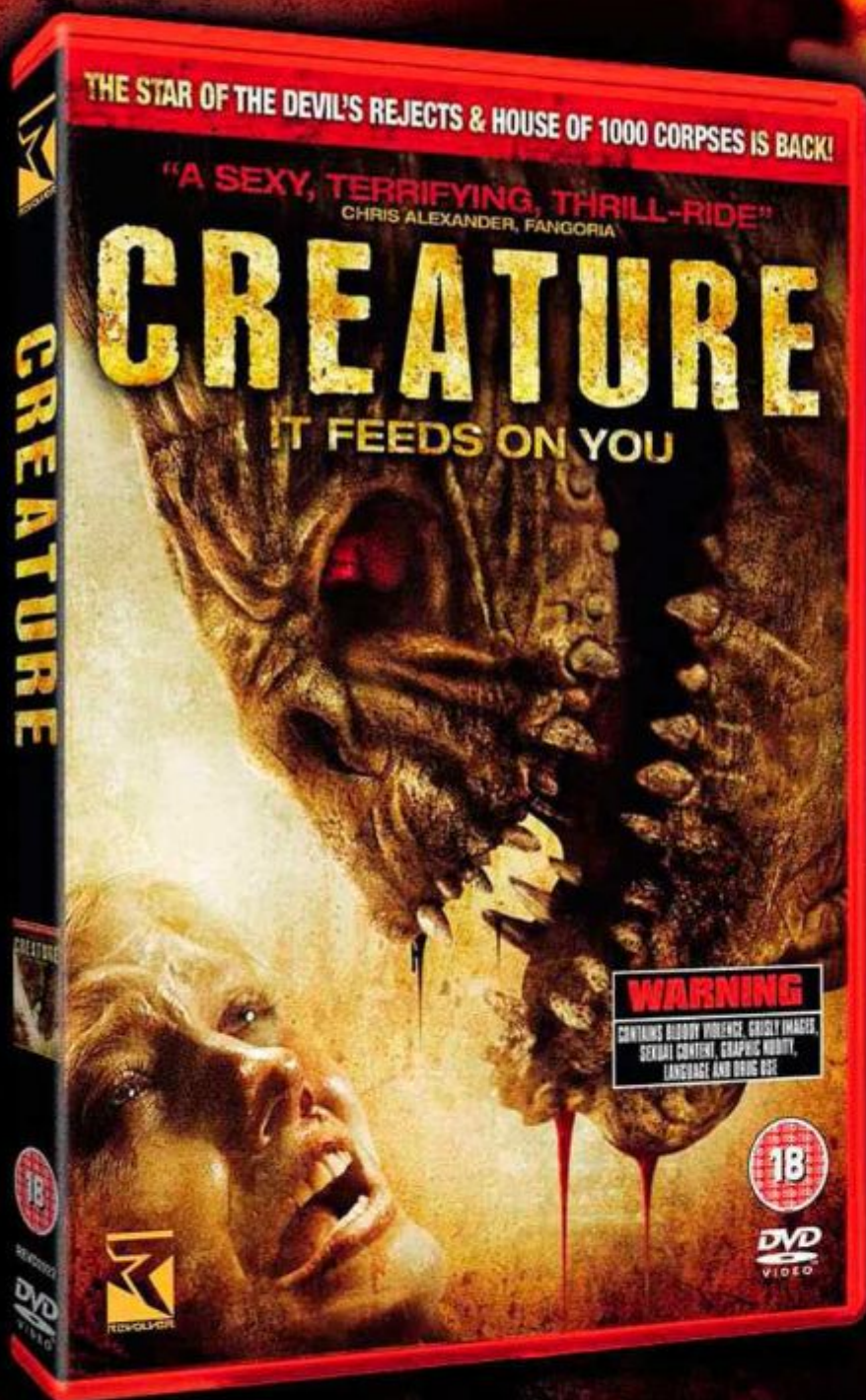
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OF KICKING THE
BUCKET



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editorial

Symbols in the Stadium

As regular readers will recall, conspiracy-minded Illuminati-watchers have long predicted that it would all kick off at the London 2012 Olympics (see **FT290:14-15**), but as we go to press the only conspiracy so far uncovered at the Games has been the one by bored-looking badminton players to lose their matches deliberately. In the run-up to the opening ceremony on 27 July, online speculation had been running high that a false flag operation involving aliens, nukes or both was a likely highlight of the opening ceremony. As the event loomed, however, even the most ardent doom-mongers started hedging their bets: "My impression is that they will not blow the Olympic stadium tonight during the opening ceremony"... "My take is that nothing will happen tonight". Indeed, it had dawned on some that with the posh seats full of reptilian Royals and Illuminati bigwigs, blowing up the stadium might be a bit of an own goal.

When nothing happened apart from a brief flurry of UFO-fuelled excitement caused (as ever) by the Goodyear blimp, the conspiracy-watchers hid their disappointment by getting back to their favourite pastime: scanning the pop-cultural landscape for the sort of signs the Illuminati elite just love to taunt us with (**FT258:32-39**). And Danny Boyle's epic, exhausting and sometimes barely comprehensible jamboree gave them plenty to chew on. First there was the music – from Elgar's "Nimrod" (the traditional builder of the Tower of Babel) and Parry's "Jerusalem" (yes, the New World Order will begin in England) to The Clash's apocalyptic "London Calling" ("The ice age is coming, the Sun's zooming in / Meltdown expected, the wheat is growing thin"). Then there were visual signs, like the Pyramid design of the stadium lights, which as any fule kno symbolises the All-Seeing Eye. Danny Boyle's name contained a numerological clue ("Date of Olympic opening ceremony: 27/7/12... 2+7+7+12 = 28... Danny Boyle... made a film called *28 Days Later*... It was about an incurable rage virus spreading throughout the UK"). And where one Tory MP saw "leftie multicultural crap", others saw a "mock child sacrifice" with "echoes of the cremation of care ceremony at Bohemian Grove". Offering a different interpretation, someone known as "Clif from halfpasthuman" sagely noted: "the symbolism points to a pandemic false flag with all the nurses and such. Beware returning athletes and fans..."

Something tells us they'll be analysing every last frame for years to come...

Jumping jellyfish

Let it never be said that *FT* doesn't have its finger firmly on the (cosmic) pulse of events. In a typically synchronistic twist, the day after we'd gone to press with issue 291 and our cover story concerning 'living UFOs' that look like giant aerial jellyfish, these very critters – unlikely as it may sound – made the news. The *Daily Mail* carried a report in which a satellite expert speculated that ET, far from being

small, grey and humanoid, might be silicon-based life-forms that resemble "football-field sized jellyfish, complete with onion-shaped appendages and an orange underbelly or bottom". What's more, we also received a report and photograph of an aerial jellyfish spotted rather close to home – flying over Epping Forest, in fact. Turn to p20 for more on these and other topical, tentacled oddities.

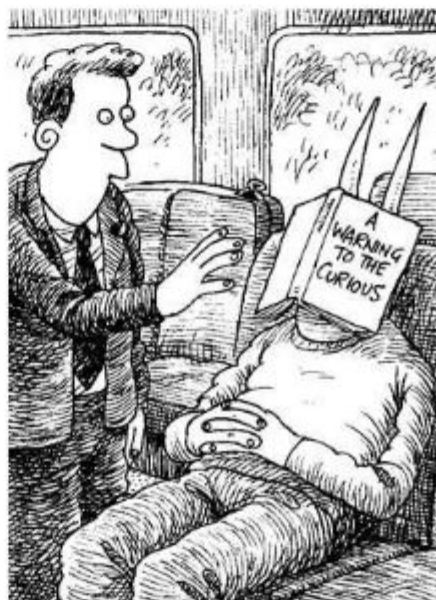
Errata

FT288:10-11 – We apologise for a mistake with the picture credits in our 'Finicky Eaters' round-up. The photo of Tempest Henderson on

p10 should have been credited to Coleman-Rayner, as should the one of Adele Edwards, which was wrongly attributed to Newspix.

FT290:2 – Reader M W Wenner pointed out that in the editorial of this issue we wrongly referred to America's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as the "Center for Disease Control and Protection".

FT290:22 – In the archaeology column, a mix-up resulted in the captions for photos of Z'EV and a researcher at Carn Ingli being the wrong way round; Z'EV is the chap wearing a hat in the photograph at the top of the page.



MARTIN ROSS

DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?



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SEE PAGE 78

[•REC]

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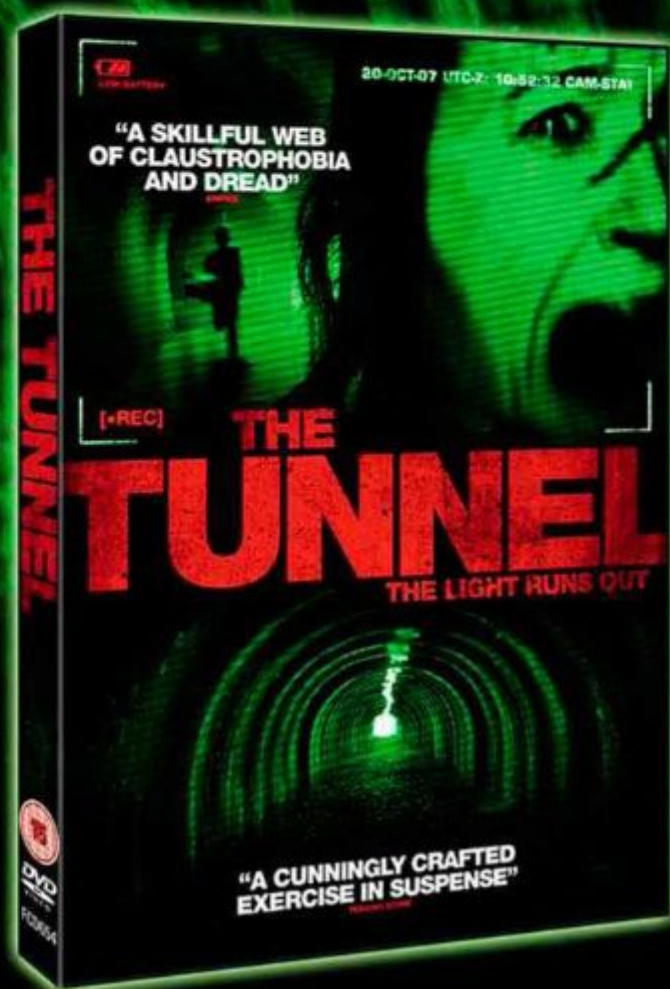


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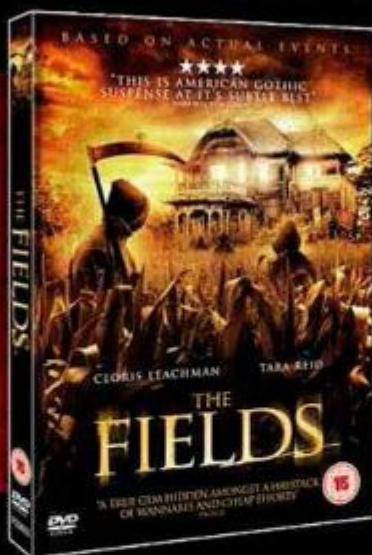
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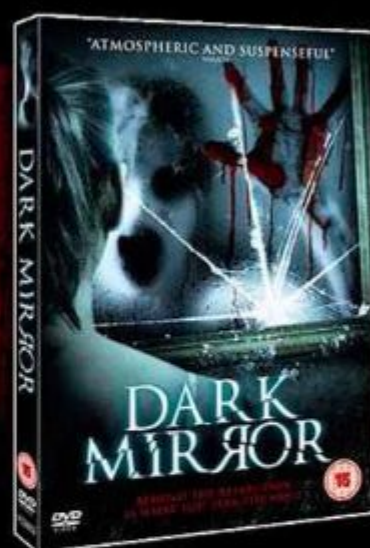
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strangedays

Batman massacre 'miracle'

Shotgun pellet traced a path through an unknown defect and avoided damage to the brain

Petra Anderson was in the audience for the showing of the Batman film *The Dark Knight Rises* in Aurora, Colorado, on 20 July 2012 when James Holmes opened fire, killing 13 and injuring 57. The 22-year-old violinist was shot four times, three times in the arm and once in the face. Fortuitously, the shotgun pellet that entered her head traversed the precise course of a brain defect – a small channel of fluid – she was unaware she had, avoiding vital areas. “It entered right through her nose,” said her sister Chloe Anderson, 25. “It went all the way through her brain and to the back of her skull. It did little damage, which is a mystery to many people including the doctors.” Doctors removed the pellet after five hours of surgery.

Brad Strait, the family’s Presbyterian pastor, said: “[The defect] is a tiny channel of fluid running through her skull like a tiny vein through marble. A millimetre in any direction and the channel is missed, the brain is destroyed, evil wins a round.” He called Petra’s survival “a matter of medical divine intervention”. She recently graduated from the Conservatory of Music at the University of the Pacific in California, and was planning on attending the University of Maryland in the autumn for a graduate degree. Those plans may change, depending on her recovery. There is a possibility that she has lost certain functions or abilities.

The massacre took place a mere 20 miles (32km) from Columbine High School, where two students gunned down 13 people in 1999. Holmes, a graduate student dropout, wore black Robocop-style armour and a gas mask, and had dyed his hair



Pastor calls it “a matter of divine intervention”

orange. Arrested in the car park behind the cinema, he told police he was The Joker, sworn enemy of Batman. Torrence Brown, Jr, whose friend AJ Boik was killed, is suing the Warner Brothers studio, claiming Holmes copied violence in the film. “Somebody has to be responsible for the rampant violence that is shown today,” he said. Good luck with that, Mr Brown. *Sun*, 21 July; [AFP] *D.Telegraph*, *Independent*, 25 July 2012.

OTHER ESCAPES FROM BULLETS

- A Brazilian man shot in the face escaped death when his dentures deflected a bullet headed for his brain. Zacarias Pacheco de Moraes, 81, was shot on 26 May 2011 while working in a bar he owns in the small western city of Alta Floresta. The bullet lodged in his throat; surgeons delayed its removal because of the risk. *telegraph.co.uk*, 29 May 2011.

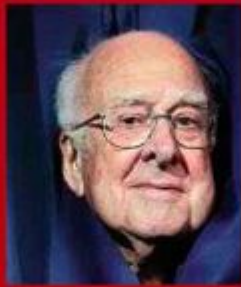
- A convenience store worker escaped with bruises when his wallet stopped a bullet in a struggle with a robber. Three men entered the store in Modesto, California, as the worker was getting money out of the cash register. (*Aberdeen*) *Press & Journal*, 24 Mar 2012.

- Richard Smeraldo, 74, of Clearwater, Florida, was watching Fourth of July fireworks at the Safety Harbor Marina on Bayshore Boulevard when, just before the finale at 9.30pm, he felt as if he had been smashed on the nose with a baseball bat. It was a 9mm bullet that had been fired into the air. It pierced the peak of his baseball cap, struck the bridge of his nose, exited his nostril and bored a path from his lower lip through the fleshy nub of his chin. Luckily, it was then deflected by a silver dog-tag medallion his daughter recently gave him to wear around his neck, splitting its chain and falling to the ground. Two weeks earlier, Mr Smeraldo had had the medallion engraved with his mother’s favourite biblical verse: “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” (Matthew 17:20). The medallion that may have saved his life was unscathed. After his face was stitched up in hospital, he looked as though he might have only taken a bad forward fall. *Tampa Bay (FL) Times*, 5 July; *ABC News*, 6 July; *D.Mail*, 7 July 2012.

- While out on routine patrol in Auckland, New Zealand, on 22 December 2009, Constable Jeremy Snow spotted a gun in a car and followed the driver into a back yard. The driver, small-time drug dealer Neshanderan Rajgopaul, 29, high on methamphetamine, started to run, then turned, dropped to one knee, and fired seven shots at the policeman. One bullet penetrated his stab-proof vest, but lodged in his notebook before it could enter his chest. *dailymail.co.uk*, 14 Feb 2011.



TABLE MANNERS
More cannibal incidents from Africa to Milwaukee
PAGE 9



BOSON HUNTER
The answer to life, the Universe... and gravity
PAGE 16



FLIPPING HACK
Countdown continues as we approach the End Times
PAGE 15

Spooky Spitfire

Witnesses see phantom fighter fall out of the sky

Although it's over 70 years since the Battle of Britain, surviving airworthy Spitfires are still occasionally seen in the skies over East Kent. So, when Jaeden and Lorraine Wintersong and their friend Gemma Pocock, all from Ashford, spotted one on 21 June while driving near Junction 11 of the M20, they were interested, but not very surprised. That was until they saw the iconic fighter aircraft "show signs of distress", go into a barrel roll and then fall from the sky.

They immediately alerted the police that a plane had crashed and made their way to Postling



Wood to help. The emergency services and a helicopter were rapidly deployed. But at the crash site there was nothing to be found: no wreckage, no remains of an aircraft of any kind.

"It was shocking," said Mr Wintersong later. "I really thought I'd

seen a plane crash. The Spitfire we saw was completely without colour and flying low over the trees, before it got into difficulties. I got to Postling Wood as soon as I could. I was expecting wreckage, fire, the works – but there was nothing there at all."

A spokesman for Kent Police said: "We were called at 11am... after a member of the public reported they had seen an aircraft fall to the ground and not re-emerge. We carried out a search of the area and also made inquiries with local flying clubs, airstrips, the Civil Aviation Authority and others. No aircraft or pilots had reported any difficulties or were missing"

Researching on the Internet later at home, Mr Wintersong found a newspaper story about a Spitfire that had crashed at the precise same spot during WWII.

"It's really chilling. Afterwards

I went straight to the pub – I needed a drink. I think we all saw the ghost of a downed Spitfire."

In 1980, the wreckage of a war-time Spitfire was found in Postling Wood (aka Bartholomew's Wood) and identified as the one flown by 21-year-old Aberconway John Sefton 'Jack' Pattinson, who was reported missing on his first mission flying the famous fighter aircraft with 92 Squadron on 12 October, 1940. His body was found in the burnt-out wreckage of the Mk I Spitfire, X4591.

The crash site is just four miles (6.4km) from one of WWII's busiest airfields, RAF Hawkinge. It is not the first ghostly Spitfire reported in Kent. Both Biggin Hill and West Malling, active RAF fighter stations throughout the war, have tales of similar apparitions. *Folkestone Herald*, 25 June 2012.

Ted Harrison

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Fish fights Alzheimer's

Jersey Eve. Post, 30 Nov 2011.

LLOYDS BOSS: I AM HUMAN

Sun, 16 Dec 2011.

Snowmen beheaded for 'damaging the grass'

D.Telegraph, 9 Feb 2012.

Illegal pigs set to fly in

Western Daily Press, 9 Nov 2011.



Manchester Evening News, 28 Jan 2012.

Westbrook Police Look For Man Who Didn't Rob Bank

ABC8 News, *wmtw.com*, 17 Feb 2012.

SHAKIRA ATTACKED BY SEA LION WHO MISTOOK BLACKBERRY FOR A FISH

The Register, via *Irish Independent*, 18 Feb 2012.

Cows talk at Forum

North West Evening Mail, 18 Jan 2012.

Morocco invaded by Mars

(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 19 Jan 2012.



PISCINE CHIMERA

Mark Sawyer, 53, tackle editor of the *Angling Times*, hooked this bizarre creature, weighing a little under 2lb (900g), while fishing for carp in Magpie Lake, Cambridge, last May. At first he

thought it was a common brown goldfish, but on closer inspection he realised it was a strange mixture. "The head resembles more of a roach, its lips aren't quite right," he said. "It has the body of a normal goldfish, its anal fin resembles a bream and the tail is

of a fantailed goldfish." He took photos of the 'Frankenfish' before throwing it back. Experts who saw the images agreed it was the offspring of more than one species. telegraph.co.uk, 28 May; *D.Mail*, *Sun*, 29 May 2012.

PHOTO: BNPS.CO.UK



THREE-BEAK FREAK

Hearing a bird making a racket in her backyard, April Britt of Northampton, Massachusetts, investigated. She was astonished to find a baby female Cardinal with two heads and three beaks. After taking some photographs and returning inside, she returned a few hours later to find the bird lying on the ground. She placed it high in a tree, concerned that it was in danger of being eaten by a neighbourhood cat, but the following morning it had disappeared.

"It is very, very rare to find a bird like this," said Valerie Osborne of the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) after viewing the pictures. "I have seen only one other similar case in the past 30 years. I would say its chances of survival are very slim. It is difficult to see how it could feed. It has obviously been fed by its parents, but if it weakens they would probably abandon it." dailymail.co.uk, 31 May 2012.

PHOTO: COURTESY APRIL BRITT



MOHAWK STYLE

This pink quadruped with a mohawk-style plume of white hair disturbed people in Xinxiang, in China's Henan province, who thought it was some kind of "genetic experiment gone wrong" from one of the scientific research centres in the neighbourhood. The police, however, said it was actually a Chinese crested hairless dog, an expensive pedigree breed that regularly features as a contender in the World's Ugliest Dog contest. *dailymail.co.uk*, 8 June 2012.

PHOTO: EUROPICS [CEN]



SPIDERMAN LIZARD

An East African lizard, the Mwanza flat-headed agama, bears a striking resemblance to the Amazing Spider-Man, both in its red and blue coloration and its crouching pose. The lizard was captured on camera at the Masai Mara National Park in Kenya by the Brazilian photographer Cassio Lopes. *dailymail.co.uk*, *The People*, 1 July 2012.

MIAN PHOTO: CATERS NEWS AGENCY LTD

INSET: GETTY IMAGES / AFP / YOSHIKAZU TSUNA

SIDELINES...

DESTINY AWAITS

Nominative determinism suggests that Bob Diamond and his prospective replacement as Barclays Bank CEO, Rich Ricci, were destined for a career in banking. Likewise, Igor Judge, the Lord Chief Justice, and John Laws, the Lord Justice of Appeal, may have felt a calling. Meteorologists Amy Freeze, Larry Sprinkle and Storm Field also seem well suited for their profession. *telegraph.co.uk*, 3 July 2012.

JUST NOT FUNNY

After attending buffets at Sunderland Civic Centre during Food Safety Week in mid-June, 18 council staff called in sick with stomach bugs. *Sun*, 19 June 2012.

ANCIENT HUMOUR

A newly translated Akkadian cuneiform tablet from the Persian Gulf region around 1,500 BC contains riddles that, to our eyes, seem incomprehensible. Try these: "In your mouth and your teeth (urine). Constantly stared at you. The measuring vessel of your lord. What is it?" (Answer: Beer). "He gouged out the eye. It is not the fate of a dead man. He cut the throat. A dead man – who is it?" (A governor). "The deflowered girl did not become pregnant. The undeflowered girl became pregnant. What is it?" (Auxiliary forces). But then, "When is a door not a door? When it's a jar" probably wouldn't mean much in ancient Akkadian. *dailymail.co.uk*, 27 Jan 2012.



Head-banging genius

Uncanny musical and mathematical skills follow accidents

Derek Amato was partying with friends on 27 October 2006 when he dived into a shallow pool and hit his head. "I remember coming up out of the water complaining that my ears were bleeding," he said. "As I looked to my friends for explanation, I recall their lips moving but without sound. As I touched my ears to check for bleeding, I realised there was no blood, and I couldn't hear anything at all. At that moment, I remember collapsing, and to this day cannot recall anything else from my accident." He was rushed to hospital and diagnosed with serious concussion. He had a 35 per cent loss of hearing, as well as memory loss; but he had also become one of about 30 people in the world suffering (if that's the right word) from Acquired Savant Syndrome, where people display amazing musical, artistic or mathematical abilities following head trauma.

The father of three had worked in public relations, karate teaching, sales and baseball coaching, without ever knowing what he really wanted. In 2002, he lost everything on a business investment and spent three months sleeping in his car before landing a job with the US postal service. The 46-year-old from Denver, Colorado, now has a musical career, despite never having had any tuition.

After the accident, he felt drawn to a friend's piano and immediately began playing. Amato, who can't read music, explained that he could see black and white squares in his mind's eye that triggered his fingers to move. "As I shut my eyes, I found these black and white structures moving from left to right, which represented in my mind a fluid and continuous stream of musical notation," he said. "My fingers began to scale the piano keys as if I had played all of my life." His friend Gerry Gomez said: "We commonly refer to Derek as 'Rainman Beethoven'." He plays eight instruments that he couldn't play



before, and is brushing up on his guitar skills, which he described as being a "2½ out of 10" before the accident.

He is currently recording his second album. His concussion has been both a curse and a gift. He suffers from severe migraines and a sensitivity to fluorescent lights that sometimes causes him to collapse. He also constantly sees music streaming in front of his eyes, yet insists that he would not have it any other way. "I think the headaches and the loss of hearing are the price tag on this particular gift and I'm OK with that," he said. "I'm convinced it's all for a reason and I think it's my job to do it right." *derekamato.wordpress.com*, 6 Jan 2010; *wisconsinmedicalsociety.org*, 4 June; *dailymail.co.uk*, *Huffington Post*, 7 June 2012.

● Steve Borlase, 39, from Warminster in Wiltshire, became a human computer at the age of five a couple of days after falling off some monkey bars in his school playground and banging his head. He has an IQ of 180 – 20 points higher than Einstein or Stephen Hawking. However, he only got a B in GCSE maths, because his arithmetical abilities did not

ABOVE: Steve Borlase gained mathematical skill after banging his head.

extend to other areas of maths, such as algebra. He left school at 16 and became a gas and electricity salesman before the work dried up. "I sent 127 emails to sales companies – but I only got two replies," he said. "I have had to take up window cleaning because it is the only work I can get. I have been working in this job [at £300 a week] for about a year but I would love a job where I can use my skills. I can see all these numbers floating around in my mind and the brightest one is always the right answer. I can work out sums going into millions in just seconds." Borlase, whose skill resembles that of maths genius janitor Will Hunting in the 1997 film *Good Will Hunting*, has represented England as a pool player. He said: "I applied to go on *Countdown* as the new Carol Vorderman, but they said I was no good as the male viewers like looking at a shapely figure... I would be great as a bookie or in a job where you have to do a lot of buying or selling." *www.thisiswiltshire.co.uk*, 23 Mar; *Western Daily Press*, *Metro*, 27 Mar 2012.

More cannibal news

Hungry president, culinary cultists and tasteless tourism

● Charles Taylor, 64, the former president of Liberia tried in The Hague for crimes against humanity, was jailed for 50 years on 30 May. He will serve his sentence in Britain. Between 1991 and 2002, he orchestrated the slaughter of up to 250,000 people in Liberia and Sierra Leone, many of whom were tortured and raped before being cooked and eaten. Tens of thousands were maimed for life. Taylor belonged to the Poro Society, said to be an ancient and secret West African cult of demon-worshippers. Joseph 'Zigzag' Marzah, his right-hand man and fellow Poro Society member, testified that on several occasions they had eaten human hearts. *Irish Times*, 15 June; *Irish D.M.*, 16 July 2009; *D.Telegraph*, 31 May 2012.

● A series of killings by a cannibal cult – numbering 700–1,000 members – delayed elections in Papua New Guinea in July. Cultists were accused of killing and eating five men and two women believed to have practised black magic in remote jungle territory around the coastal town of Madang. They were armed with home-made guns fashioned from rubber, and long-bladed knives they considered to be 'possessed'. In a dawn raid on Biam village, police arrested 29 cultists, including a boy of 13 and a teacher in his 50s, but two men – including a local councillor thought to be the cult leader – remained at large. A further 100 arrests were expected.

Many Papuans believe in sorcery (known as *sanguma* or *puripuri*), often blaming it for deaths, accidents, illness and misfortune. Black magic was outlawed under the 1971 Sorcery Act, but 'good' magic – aimed at curing illness or banishing evil spirits – remains legal. The cult began as an attempt to curb extortion by sorcerers who were demanding money for



ABOVE: Liberian troops with a skull taken from Charles Taylor's followers.

Anthony Wagambie Jr, a police commander, said several members had confessed to eating body parts and making soup from their victims' penises – a practice they believed would bolster their supernatural powers to detect sorcerers. [AAP] *D.Telegraph*, 6+14 July; *Independent*, 14 July 2012.

● A planned walking tour of the Milwaukee gay bars and other haunts where Jeffrey Dahmer trolled for victims has drawn protests from his victims' kinsfolk, prompting online deal-maker Groupon to cancel its promotion for discounted tickets. However, tour-organiser

Bam Marketing and Media said it was not deterred. Dahmer spent years frequenting Walker's Point-area gay bars. He was arrested in 1991 and admitted killing 17 young men, some of whom he mutilated and cannibalised. He was serving a life sentence when a fellow inmate beat him to death in 1994. Walker's Point now sits in the middle of a revitalised Milwaukee neighbourhood, with new restaurants and bars in remodelled buildings that once housed the bars where Dahmer went. *Huffington Post*, 25 June 2012.

On several occasions they had eaten human hearts

curing the sick, and sex with their clients' wives or teenage daughters. "They killed [the first victim] on the roadside," said a local political activist. "They cut out his heart and brains, and drank his blood."



SIDELINES...

RAINING MONEY

During the evening of 10 May, motorists in Melbourne drove into a cloud of banknotes on the Western Ring Road free-way near Keilor East. Over four hours, passers-by scooped up an estimated \$20,000 in \$100 and \$50 notes. Three days later, the authorities had yet to discover where the cash had come from – or where it went (apart from \$2,000 returned by one conscience-stricken man). (*Sydney D.Telegraph*, 14 May 2012.

RAINING SHEEP

On 30 May, a lorry carrying 400 sheep overturned on a flyover in Melbourne, and as it teetered precariously, many sheep plunged to the road below. Several cars were wrecked as they were hit by falling animals or swerved to avoid them. Many sheep were killed or injured, but there were no human casualties. *BBC News*, 1 June 2012.

END NIGH?

A new poll has found that nearly one in seven people believe the world will come to an end in their lifetime and one in 10 think the Mayan calendar signifies that it could happen this year. IPSOS Global Public Affairs conducted the poll for Reuters, surveying 16,262 adults in 21 countries. *NY Daily News*, 2 May 2012.

CREDO QUIA ABSURDUM

A Spanish teacher from San Benito, Texas, was suspended from a high school near Harlingen after telling students that Jesus fathered a child with Mary Magdalene, and she herself was Mary Magdalene reincarnated, married to God and also pregnant. She said that God's army would destroy this world on 21 December – but not to worry, as Jesus had created another more beautiful planet full of waterfalls where everybody was always 25, money didn't exist, but Santa Claus did. A student recorded 12 minutes of her rant and posted it on YouTube. <http://blog.chron.com/believe-itornot>, 18 May 2012.



SIDELINES...

SMURF HUNT

Police in Gloucestershire were searching for a man dressed like a Smurf. The man – wearing a skin-tight blue Morphsuit and blue face paint – had been running up to women in the Forest of Dean area, waving and performing star-jumps. The incidents took place in May Hill, Longhope, on 20 May and 2 June. *D.Telegraph, 7 June 2012.*

AL-QAEDA RELICS

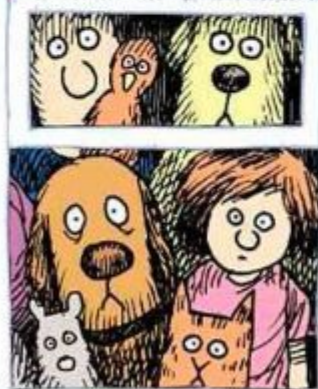
Osama Bin Laden's house in Abbottabad, Pakistan, was to be sold brick by brick following his shooting by US forces on 2 May 2011. Two baths and a homemade TV aerial were also put on sale by the contractor Shakeel Ahmed, who bulldozed the house in February. *D.Telegraph, 1 May 2012.*

THE BARE TRUTH

The world's first all-naked radio station has gone on air in Belgrade, Serbia. Presenters Ognjen Amidzic and Marinko Madzgalj insist all staff, guests and even callers to the station must be unclothed. "People are more honest when they are naked," said Amidzic. *Metro, Sun, 18 June 2012.*

FULL HOUSE

In October 2011, the RSPCA raided a four-bedroom, semi-detached house in Minehead, Somerset, where James and Nicola Hood lived with their five small children. Braving a strong smell of ammonia, they found 56 large dogs, three cats, six birds and four chinchillas. *D.Telegraph, 31 Mar 2012.*



GREAT PRETENDERS

A MAN WITH 40 OR MORE ALTER EGOS, PLUS TWINS WITH A GIFT FOR SCAMS

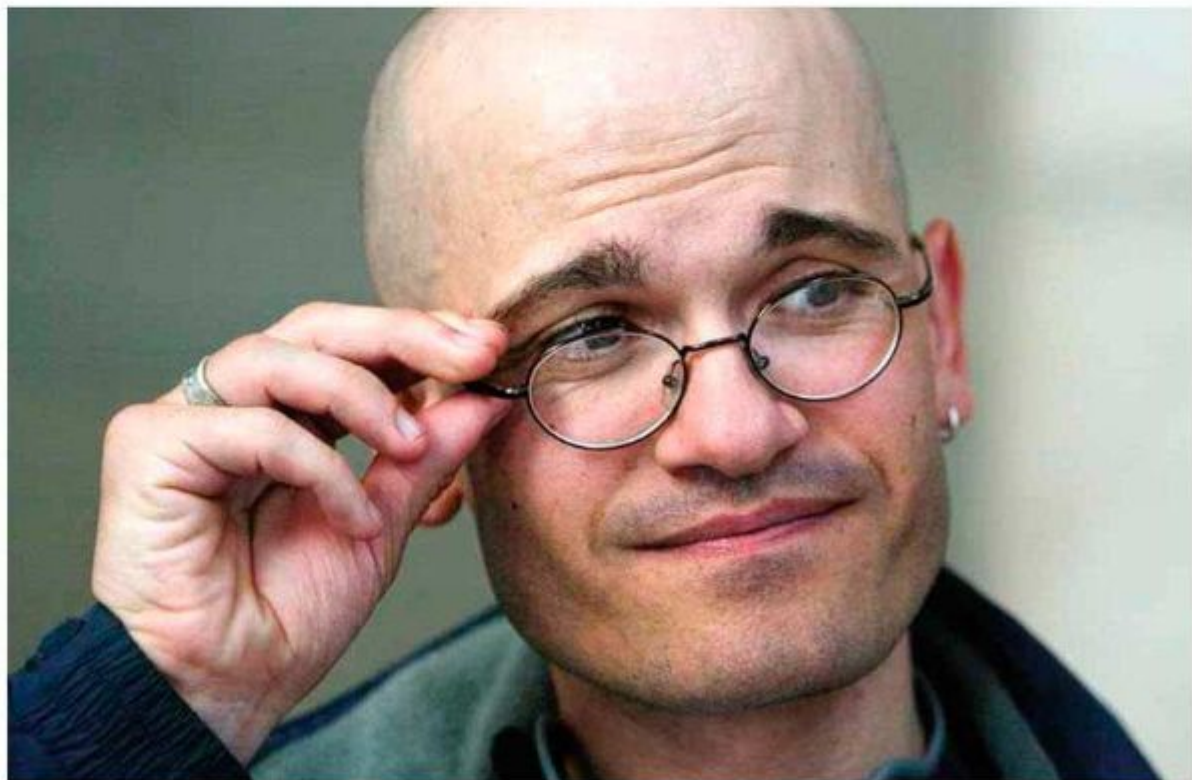


PHOTO SHOOT

ABOVE: Frédéric Bourdin has adopted a variety of identities over the years, including the missing Nicholas Barclay (below).

● Frédéric Bourdin was born in June 1974 in Nanterre on the outskirts of Paris. He never knew his father, an Algerian immigrant, and was abandoned by his mother at the age of two. Raised by his poor grandparents in a hamlet near Nantes, he began inventing stories about himself to impress his friends, claiming his father was never around because he was a British secret agent. He began misbehaving at school and stealing from neighbours, so at the age of 12 he was sent to reform school. When he was 16, he ran away and hitchhiked to Paris where he told a policeman he was a lost British teenager. When it was found he spoke almost no English, he admitted his deceit and was sent back to the reform school.

Over the next few years, Bourdin became fluent in five languages and conned himself into foster homes, orphanages, schools and children's hospitals, each time using a different name and elaborate back story. By the age of 18, he had posed as more than a dozen different children; throughout his life of deception, he is believed to have taken on more than 40 false

identities in at least 16 countries including England, Germany, Sweden and Denmark. In 1991, when he was 20, he stayed at a Glasgow care home for two months after convincing staff he was 14 and had been sold to Irish child abusers. Mostly he masqueraded as a destitute child, changing his appearance by using hair removal cream, altering his deep voice, and adopting the walk and mannerisms of a teenager – but his other impostures allegedly included a rich English tourist, a lecturer, a trainee priest and a tiger healer.

In 1994, a schoolboy called Nicholas Barclay disappeared from San Antonio, Texas. Three years later, he turned up in Spain. His mother Beverly showered him with affection after he was flown home. The family seemed unconcerned that Nicholas now had blue eyes – not brown as before – his ears had changed shape and he had a French accent. He claimed the changes were the result of abuse and experiments done by his captors who punished him unless he spoke French. Charlie Parker (no, not *that* one), a private eye hired

San Antonio Texas



NICHOLAS BARCLAY

DOB: Dec 31, 1980
Missing: Jun 13, 1994
Age Now: 27
Sex: Male
Race: White
Hair: Lt. Brown
Eyes: Blue
Height: 4'8" (142 cm)
Weight: 80 lbs (36 kg)
Missing From:
SAN ANTONIO
TX
United States



Age Progressed

Nicholas's photo is shown age-progressed to 26 years. He has three tattoos: the letter T on his left hand between his thumb and forefinger, the letter J on his left shoulder, and the letters L and H on the outside of his left ankle.



by a television company to investigate the amazing story, smelled a rat, and eventually fingerprints and a DNA sample identified “Nicholas” as Bourdin. He was 23, not 16, and had fooled the Barclay family for five months. The real Nicholas Barclay is still missing.

Bourdin spent six years in a US jail for passport fraud and perjury, returning to France in 2003, where he tried to pass himself off as Leo Balley, who had gone missing in 1996, aged seven. A doctor who examined him at the request of school authorities in Grenoble concluded he was indeed 14, even though he was really 30. In the end, he was exposed by a DNA test. In August 2004, he was in Spain claiming to be a 15-year-old whose mother had died in the Madrid train bombings in March that year. He had been obliged to dye his grey hair and wear a baseball cap to conceal his bald patch. Back in France in 2005, he impersonated a Spanish orphan and attended a French boarding school with pupils half his age. He was exposed when a teacher saw him in a documentary – and he promised never again to impersonate anyone. In 2007, he married a French woman, and today he is 38 and has three children.

The 2010 film *The Chameleon*

is a fictionalised account of the Nicholas Barclay case by French director and screenwriter Jean-Paul Salomé. There is also a British documentary about Bourdin called *The Imposter*. A long feature on him by David Grann appeared in *The New Yorker* on 11 August 2008, and can be found online. *D.Mirror*, 30 June 2012.

- The Gang of Fort is reminded of Birdie Jo Hoaks and Becky Jo Hoaks, the superbly apt names of identical twin sisters who, for more than a decade, conned kind-hearted strangers by posing as deprived children. In 2004, aged 33, the sisters were arrested and charged with a string of crimes. Birdie, a mother of three, had persuaded Pastor Jim Jones (no, not *that* one) and his congregation in Galena, Kansas, that she was a 13-year-old boy called Chris Gomez who had been abused by a violent stepfather. ‘His’ story was backed up by Becky, who pretended to be ‘his’ elder sister. Birdie was put in a special needs class at a local school, because she pretended to be illiterate. After the twins were rumbled, it turned out they were wanted for similar scams in 14 US states.

The twins, born in Hoopston, Illinois, on April Fools’ Day

1971, briefly joined the National Guard before starting their life of imposture in December 1992, spending six weeks living for free in a children’s home in Wichita, Kansas. There they pretended to be just one 12-year-old boy. Birdie, then 21, finally confessed to welfare workers, but they refused to believe her until a medical examination showed she had bound her breasts with tape and had a Caesarean scar. The twins fled the state before they could be charged. When they were busted in Bennington, Vermont, the next year, they had already run scams in Idaho, Texas, Maine, New Jersey, West Virginia and New York [FT70:18]. In 1995, Birdie was busted in Salt Lake City, where she had posed as a 13-year-old boy abandoned at a bus stop [FT88:18]. By 1996, she had served two jail terms. News stories on her often failed to note her twin sister’s existence. When cornered by a television crew, Birdie kept up the pretence of acting solo, claiming she was living rough and it was safer to pose as a boy. The twins are still up to mischief. They were caught pick-pocketing in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in May 2011. *Sunday magazine*, 23 May 2004; *Deseret (UT) News*, 16 May 2007; *News 9 (OK)*, 4 May 2011.

SIDELINES...

MADONNA FOR PEACE

Madonna launched her world tour in Tel Aviv on 1 June with a plea for peace in the Middle East – against a backdrop of an enormous illuminated crucifix and satanic symbols. The student of Kabbalah then performed her song *Gang Bang* accompanied by images of bloodstains, video clips of her spraying bullets from a machine gun and closing on the phrase “Die, bitch!” *D.Telegraph*, 2 June 2012.

SPRAYING DRUGS?

On 10 May, the Greek Air Force issued a statement firmly denying that unknown planes were spraying the population with mind-altering chemicals, a claim made by several newly elected MPs from the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party, who had demanded to know the nationality of those flying the planes. (*London*) *Eve. Standard*, 11 May 2012.

AVOIDING VENUS

A sleepy co-pilot sent his plane into a 400ft (120m) nosedive, injuring 16 passengers and crew. The unnamed officer on an Air Canada Boeing 767 night flight from Toronto to Zurich in January 2011 had just woken from a nap when a colleague told him a US Air Force plane was ahead. He mistook the planet Venus for the aircraft and overrode the autopilot by pressing on the control column. After 46 seconds, the captain righted the plane and returned to cruising altitude. *Western Mail*, 18 April 2012.

115-YEAR ITCH

Giant tortoises Bibi and Poldi had been living together in harmony under the same roof and in different cities for 115 years, since shortly after their birth in 1897. Then last May, Bibi bit off a chunk of Poldi’s shell and carried out several more attacks, forcing keepers to move Poldi to a separate cage for his own safety. The pair have been at Klagenfurt Zoo in Austria for the last 36 years. *Independent*, 14 June 2012.

FOREST BOY UPDATE

Der Waldjunge (“Forest Boy”), who turned up in Berlin on 5 September 2011 (FT281:4–5) claiming to be a 17-year-old called Ray who had lived wild in a forest for five years, finally allowed the German police to circulate his photo in early June. A few days later, his stepmother Ellen Van Helsum saw the photo and identified him as Robin Van Helsum, 20, who had disappeared from his flat in Hengelo in the eastern Netherlands on 2 September. A police spokesman said he was free to leave Berlin, but might face charges. Later, the city’s social authorities said they planned to sue him for £16,000 – to cover nine months free bed and board, clothing, German lessons and £1,800 pocket money. Robin’s parents divorced when he was a toddler, and his mother took him and his elder brother Thomas to Portugal. His father Johan, a bus driver, won a custody battle and brought his sons back to the Netherlands. “Robin was really traumatised by those early years,” said his friend Mo Rahim Rigi. He left home at the age of 16 and his father allowed him to live in supervised accommodation in the nearby town of Almelo, where he got a girl pregnant. Their son, Damien, is now two. Robin returned to Hengelo, began a college course, but dropped out and in August 2010 moved into a flat with Mo Rigi. After he disappeared, his father spent several months trying to find him and appealing for information as to his whereabouts – but died from cancer in February 2012. *Guardian*, 15 June; *D.Telegraph*, 16+21 June; *Sunday Telegraph*, 17 June 2012.





SIDELINES...

PIED PIPER NEEDED

Hamelin (Hameln) needs the services of the Pied Piper again after a growing legion of rats knocked out power to one of the German town's fountains. The rodents had chewed through electricity cables operating the fountain, which stands outside the railway station. The rats' cable-gnawing had also led to occasional problems with nearby traffic lights. *BBC News*, 25 May 2012.

SPIKE TO THE RESCUE

A boy of 11 impaled on a metal fence was rescued after the alarm was raised by a dog called Spike. Jack Humphrey of North Ormesby, Middlesbrough, was climbing a tree when he fell. Spike heard his screams and raced to the scene from a nearby house. Spike's owner, James Harrigan, rang 999 and held Jack up for 40 minutes while fire crews cut him free. *Sun*, 24 April 2012.

HAIR-DRYER MYSTERY

Over seven days in May, four parcels from Paris, each containing a hair-dryer or hair clippers, and £85 in cash, were delivered to addresses in the Greymouth and Hokitika areas on New Zealand's west coast. No one knew who had sent the parcels or why. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 16 May 2012.



MARTIN ROSS

'EIGHTH WONDER' BURNS DOWN



For Nikolai Petrovich Sutyagin, his 13-storey wooden dacha in Arkhangelsk north-west Russia, was "the eighth wonder of the world". When the gangster began building in 1992, he only intended to erect two storeys, but after seeing wooden houses in Japan and Norway he concluded that he had not used roof space efficiently enough and decided to keep building. "First I added three floors but then the house looked ungainly, like a mushroom," he said. "So I added another and it still didn't look right so I kept going. What you see today is a happy accident." A whimsical jumble of planking 144ft (44m) tall, from a distance it resembled a Japanese pagoda, but at closer quarters it seemed more like a cross between a Brobdingnagian tree house and the lair of a wicked fairytale character. Built without formal plans or a building permit, it was thought to be the world's tallest wooden house.

In 1998, Sutyagin was sent down for four years, his third jail term, on racketeering charges. He says he was

set up and that while in prison, his rivals destroyed his equipment, stole his money and threw his five cars into the Dvina river. By 2007, aged 60, he was living in four poorly heated rooms on the ground floor; what was left of his fantasy skyscraper was slowly decaying around him.

In 2008, it was condemned by the city as a fire hazard, and the courts, citing bylaws that said no wooden structure should be higher than two floors, ordered it to be demolished by 1 February 2009. Sutyagin erected a roof around the second floor that he said allowed him to claim that everything above was purely decorative; but on 26 December 2008, the tower was pulled down, and the remainder was dismantled manually over the course of the next several months. The remaining four-storey structure burned to the ground on 6 May 2012, after fire spread from Sutyagin's five-storey bathhouse in the garden. *D.Telegraph*, 7 Mar 2007; *Irish Daily Star*, 8 May 2012. See **FT228:16-17**.

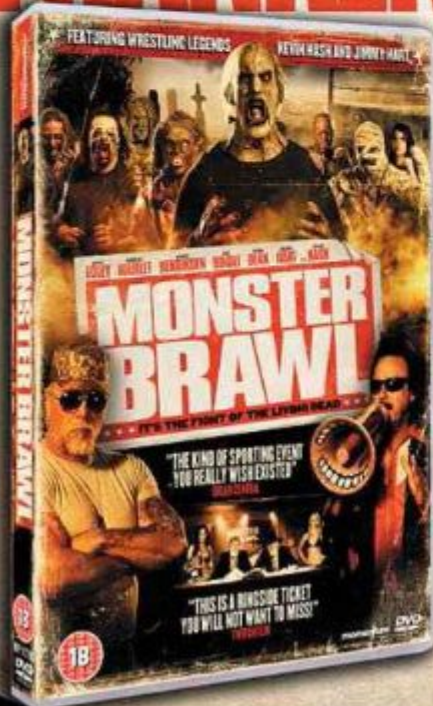
DAVE FOLEY ROBERT MAILLET LANCE HENRIKSEN ART HINDLE HERB DEAN JIMMY HART AND KEVIN NASH

MONSTER BRAWL

★ ★ ★ IT'S THE FIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



FRANKENSTEIN ★ ★ ★ WEREWOLF



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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

FURTHER NEWS ON STORIES PREVIOUSLY COVERED IN THE PAGES OF FORTEAN TIMES

FERAL NEWS [FT252:17]



A boy of two raised mainly by goats has been rescued by social workers. The malnourished wild child, named only as Sasha T, was locked away in a room with the animals. He played and slept with them – and had never been taught how to speak, eat like a human, or use a potty. Irina Bochkova, deputy head of social work in Shakhti, in Russia's Rostov region, said: "When we came in, Sasha was sitting in the ice-cold room, undressed. His mum was absent. Every hour could have become his last. It was incredibly cold, dirty and smelly in that house. We just grabbed him and rushed him to the city hospital. Doctors said that, because of how he lived, his brain has not developed properly."

The boy weighed a third less than a typical child of his age. "He refused to sleep in the cot," said children's doctor Natalya Simonina. "He tried to get under it and sleep there. He was very scared of adults. He tried to break everything he saw – windows, furniture. He could not speak or hold a spoon. He had no idea about what to do with toys." Sasha's mother Marina, 40, was set to lose her maternal rights.

The earliest 'true' account of a feral child was related by the usually dependable Roman historian Procopius. A baby boy, lost by his mother during the chaos of the Gothic wars in about AD 250, was found and suckled by a she-goat. When the survivors returned to their homes, they found the boy living with his adopted mother and named him Aegisthus. Procopius says he saw the child himself. In 1990, a child said to have been raised by goats from the age of four to 12 was found in the Peruvian Andes [FT59:20]. *FT* knows of no other reports of children raised by goats. *Sun*, *D.Mirror*, 2 June 2012. For a general survey of feral children, see FT161:34–41.

FALLING LIKE NINEPINS [FT268:23]



In April and May 2012, hundreds of Afghan schoolchildren were admitted to hospital after falling victim to what appeared to be six separate poison gas attacks. Three alleged attacks occurred in northern Takhar province in the last week of May alone, effecting more than 300 girls. As with earlier attacks in the last three years or so, opinion was divided between those who blamed social conservatives objecting to female education – the Taliban or Islamists from Pakistan or Iran – and those who suspect mass sociogenic illness ("mass hysteria").

On 29 May, 170 girls in Takhar's provincial capital, Taloqan, were hospitalised after falling ill and losing consciousness. Pupils blamed poison gas, claiming to have sniffed a noxious odour on entering their classroom in Ahan Dara Girls' High School. Students at Bibi Hajera school also blamed toxic gas for poisoning them in two separate attacks on 23 and 27 May. "Outside interference was responsible," insisted the school principal, Abdul Hai. "The Afghan Taliban aren't sophisticated enough to develop poisons. This was caused by the enemies of Afghanistan and our government" [?!].

Girls at another school in Takhar became ill in April and said the drinking water in their well had been deliberately poisoned. More than 200 boys at a school in eastern Khost province also fell sick in mid-May as well as 100 girls in northern Balkh province on 9 May. Their school said its well had been poisoned. Another 60 girls in two other schools fainted on 5 June. Further incidents were reported in the provinces of Khost, Bamiyan and Nangarhar.

Most pupils in all incidents were released from hospital

on the same day as they were admitted and no long-term damage was recorded. Testing by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) of more than 200 pupils' blood samples from all the schools affected failed to identify any toxic substances; and the fact that few teachers were taken ill also argued against mass poisoning. Nevertheless, in the first four days of June, Afghan security forces arrested 16 'suspects'; most protested their innocence and were released; two, however, including a schoolteacher called Najibullah, admitted bringing two bottles of poison to Takhar from Pakistan, via Kunar province, one of which was allegedly given to a schoolgirl. Gul Agha Ahmadi, a media adviser at the Ministry of Education in Kabul, said mass sociogenic illness could not be ruled out, because Afghan people lived in constant fear of insurgent attacks – but Lotfullah Mashal, a spokesman for the National Directorate of Intelligence, said closing schools was part of the Taliban's spring offensive, even though the Islamic group vehemently denied any involvement.

For similar outbreaks of fainting, nausea, etc, blamed on "unidentified gas" in tense political environments, see FT55:24 (Kosovo, 1990); FT169:20 (Macedonia, 2002); FT173:29 (Ukraine, 2003); FT210:22–23 (Chechnya, 2005–2006). Earlier cases were reported in the Palestinian territories in 1983 and Soviet Georgia in 1989. *Independent*, 1 June; *MX News (Sydney)*, 6 June; *BBC News*, 4 July; *D.Telegraph*, 5 July 2012.

JOHN THE BAPTIST RELICS [FT270:20]



In 2010, human bones – small cranial and jaw fragments, a right-handed knuckle-bone and a tooth – along with three animal bones, were discovered on Sveti Ivan (St

John) Island in the Black Sea, near the Bulgarian town of Sozopol. They were in an ancient alabaster reliquary embedded in an altar in a fifth-century monastery. The human remains were said to be those of St John the Baptist, a claim greeted with widespread scepticism, since scores of churches round Europe and beyond have long claimed to possess various bits of the saint – for instance, Damascus, Rome and Munich all claim to have his skull. Besides the relics enumerated in *FT*'s previous report, a Serbian Orthodox monastery in Montenegro claims to have the right hand with which the prophet allegedly baptised Jesus in the River Jordan.

On 31 May, a team of archaeologists from Oxford University announced that the Bulgarian bones had been carbon-dated to the first century AD, thus not contradicting the bold claim that they belong to the saint – although *proving* that they do is quite another matter. "We had suspected that the bones might have been more recent than this, perhaps from the third or fourth centuries," said Oxford Professor Tom Higham, an atheist who led the study. The findings of another Oxford researcher, Christopher Ramsey, using historical documents, suggested that the monastery of Sveti Ivan might have received a portion of John the Baptist's relics in the fifth or early sixth centuries. Scientists from the University of Copenhagen analysed the DNA of the bones, finding they came from a single individual, probably a man, from a family in the Middle East – so it all fits. *D.Telegraph*, 5 June; *Irish Independent*, 30 June 2012.

WAKING UP GAY [FT284:21]



After suffering a stroke and broken neck, Welsh rugby player Chris Birch awoke from a coma last year and found

that his sexual orientation had changed from straight to gay. Vikki Salmon (36), a mother of two who had bedded 20 men, had the equivalent transformation after nearly dying in a blaze at her tower block flat in Brinnington, Stockport, in July 2011. When she awoke from a 16-day coma she found that men repelled her.

She reconnected with her lesbian friend Julia Smith (25) and realised she had become attracted to her. They moved in together and were planning to get married. "I've never had any gay tendencies before," she said, "then all of a sudden I'm a full-blown lesbian." *Sun*, 20 April 2012.

THE DINGO DETECTIVES [FT288:16]

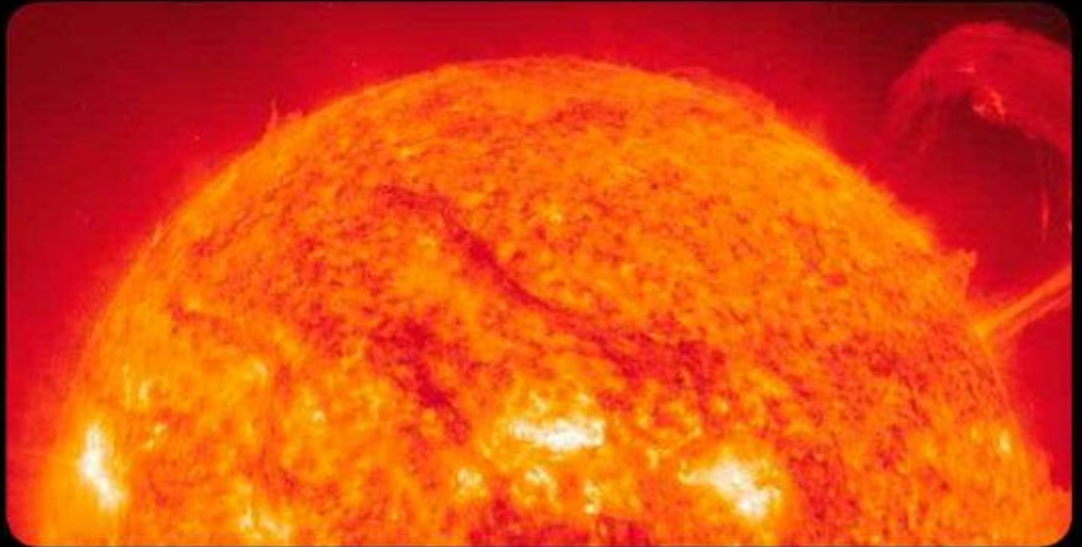


After 32 years, Lindy Chamberlain (now Mrs Chamberlain-Creighton) has finally received a legal ruling that a dingo killed her baby. Elizabeth Morris, deputy coroner for Australia's Northern Territory, said: "Azaria Chamberlain died at Uluru [Ayer's Rock] on 17 August 1980 and the cause of death was as the result of being taken by a dingo." (Note that the death was not in 1982, as stated in the recent Science column). The new finding was based on fresh evidence about hundreds of unprovoked dingo attacks on children in the country. Morris heard that, since the last inquest in 1995, which left open the cause of death, there had been 239 attacks on children. The Azaria saga has involved four inquests, a trial, two appeals and a royal commission.

Chamberlain – a Jehovah's Witness from New Zealand – was convicted of murder and spent three years in jail before her conviction was quashed in 1988. The case caused hysteria across Australia and led to the film *A Cry in the Dark* starring Meryl Streep, as well as an opera. *D.Telegraph*, 13 June 2012. For FT's initial report on the case, see FT49:10–11.

2012 WATCH

PETER BROOKESMITH PONDERES A NASTY NEW AGE OF FIRE AND BRIMSTONE



POLE-DANCING TO PERDITION

Some of the many perversely gleeful predictions as to how The World As We Know It will come screeching to a halt just before Christmas this year suggest that the Earth's magnetic poles will abruptly reverse. Others say that the planet's axis of rotation will flip: the Earth will turn upside down, and millions of previously antipodean sheep will be on top of the world. Courtesy of piles of pseudo-science, baseless 'history' and general gibberish, a gent called Patrick Geryl (below) has worked out that *both* these things will happen, *and* the Sun's magnetic field will reverse itself too – to the great discomfort and rapid demise of most of us.

Mr Geryl harps, rather, on the destruction. "What horrible chaos will terrorize your life for the foreseeable future?" he asks. For "life after a polar reversal is nothing but horror, pure unimaginable horror. ... Terrible hunger, cold and pain, and more will rule your daily life..." He goes on to list 13 specific kinds of unpleasantness that await us before the real pain begins. Here is the broad picture.

First, the Sun's magnetic inversion will destroy all electronic equipment. Satellites will conk out and all our computers will fry. Power and phone networks will be "torn apart and completely useless... forever". When the Earth flips over, huge earthquakes and volcanic outbursts will destroy all buildings and books, along with food, health services, oil supplies, and transport systems – vehicles will be "compressed into tin (*sic*)". The Earth will be poisoned with toxic chemicals and radioactive materials – "everywhere on this planet you will be confronted with mountains of grunge, a cluttered mess"; and, worse, pollutants "that get trapped under the poles [*sic* again] can remain there untouched

until the next pole shift". Meanwhile, "Almost all regions will have a climate change." Well, they would, wouldn't they?

"Nothing," he assures us in a moment of blindness to most of human history, "works without electricity." So, "For a lot of people this will be sufficient reason not to choose the effort needed to survive and accept their fate without any resistance, preferring to die in the apocalyptic events than to keep on living in a seemingly endless fight." Geryl also tells us that from childhood he "has had an inner feeling that when I grow up, I would create something 'big': 'save the world.'" We'd never have guessed. Not

least because he offers no safeguard that could with certainty survive and be used to rebuild civilisation. And how could he, when the coming disaster is so comprehensive?

What is it with these people who gloat over global ruin? Isn't the New Age supposed to be all about peace, love, and cosmic enlightenment? Geryl's prophecy exposes a strand of vindictive righteousness – unconscious though it may be – in the movement's thinking. In the face of

unflinching global indifference to its whacky ideas, this sect of the New Age prefers the vision of an imminently scorched Earth to the gradualism of friendly persuasion. Incurable sinners who choose to look askance at its promises deserve to suffer, and not in a good way. This is a New Puritanism: like a hell-fire preacher of old, it stands less for something than against almost everything – in this case, the old, tried, and tested. In the dawn of the New Age, tyranny treads not far behind. We have indeed been warned.

REFERENCE

<http://bit.ly/dNpS69> (world-mysteries.com).



FINDING THE GOD PARTICLE

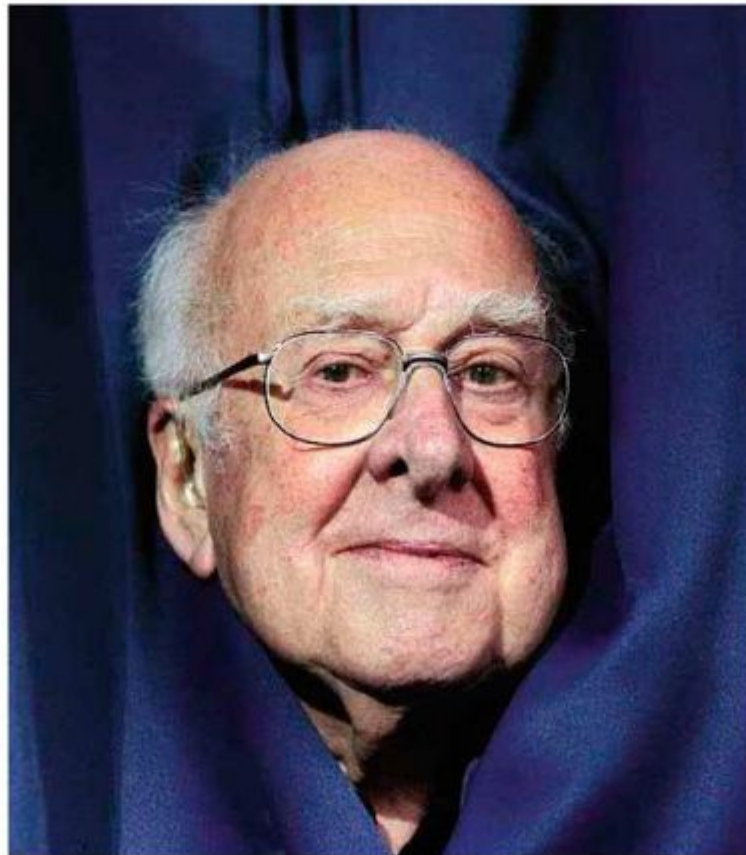
Could the secret of life, the Universe and everything lie with a subatomic entity? **DAVID HAMBLING** hunts down the mysterious Higgs boson.

The discovery of the Higgs boson set champagne corks popping across the world of science, as the six-billion-pound gamble on building the Large Hadron Collider paid off with a jackpot. While the 'God particle' may have been overhyped – the original term was 'goddam particle' ¹ – it's a Nobel-worthy discovery because it helps answer the key question of why things have mass. And while scientists are hoping the Higgs boson will turn out to match their description when they study it in detail, they're also hoping it's a bit weirder than it first appears.

The story starts with the earliest Greek philosophers setting out to explain why the world is the way it is without having to refer to gods or myths. Heraclitus of Ephesus (c.535 – c.475 BC) had a go, theorising that the Universe was a single flowing entity in a state of flux – "You can't step in the same river twice" was one of his aphorisms. It's driven by matched pairs of opposing forces, called "the upward-downward path" in which the forces are different aspects of the same thing.

He was followed by Democritus, who developed the idea of atoms proposed by his teacher Leucippus. Democritus's atomic theory held that water might change into ice or wood into smoke and ash, but these changes were just the rearrangement of the minute particles of which things were made. The atoms themselves remained unchanged and eternal. 'Atom' means uncuttable: they are the ultimate, indivisible building blocks of the Universe. They could be combined in any number of ways to make up the objects we see around us. The infinite complexity of the world – a mountain, a bird, a rose – could all be explained as different arrangements of atoms.

"By convention there is sweet, by convention there is bitterness, by convention hot and cold, by convention colour," Democritus states in one of the remaining fragments of his work. "But in



reality there are only atoms and the void." ²

Democritus implied there was only one type of atom, and it was a tidy if theoretical scheme until the 18th century, when chemists started to discover the elements. Water could be broken down into hydrogen and oxygen, but hydrogen and oxygen were fundamental. Each element was composed of a certain type of atom. The number of elements and hence different atoms kept growing – 34 by 1800 up to 84 by 1900 – so the fundamental Universe seemed rather untidy.

However, regularities in chemical and physical properties showed that the elements could be tidily arranged into what is known as the Periodic Table based on their atomic weight and chemical activity. In 1911, Ernest Rutherford showed that atoms were misnamed; they were not fundamental but splittable. Each atom had a nucleus made up of smaller particles – protons (and neutrons, later theorised and then confirmed) surrounded by electrons. All the different elements were just assemblages of

It might be that the Higgs is not quite the version described in the Standard Model

different numbers of protons and neutrons. It was all very simple again and handily reduced the number of fundamental building blocks back down to three.

But proliferation soon set in: more obscure subatomic particles kept turning up – neutrinos and muons and kaons and more. And protons and neutrons turned out to be made of quarks, of which there are several 'flavours'. Again, this embarrassment of riches led to the particles being corralled into a neat table with an underlying theoretical framework known as the Standard Model, which evolved in the 1970s.

The Standard Model arranges known particles into a four-by-four table. It had one missing piece, the Higgs boson (named after physicist Peter Higgs, above), the

cherry on top that would account for the mass of all the other particles. Finding a Higgs boson that matches the predictions of the Standard Model validates the model and shows that the theoretical predictions match the real world.

Unfortunately, the Standard Model cannot explain some of the weirder aspects of the Universe – in particular the large amounts of mysterious dark matter out there. So proving the Standard Model is not everything. But it might be that the Higgs is not quite the version described in the Standard Model. It should sometimes decay into Tau particles, and this has not been observed. This raises the possibility of a more exotic Higgs, one that would fit with an extension of the Standard Model called Supersymmetry. This would add a whole set of four Higgs bosons and could potentially account for dark matter.

All this is very much in the spirit of Heraclitus and Democritus. Modern researchers are doing exactly what they did: trying to understand the world in terms of its smallest, simplest particles and symmetrical forces that govern them.

The Higgs boson may not even be fundamental, but might be made up of smaller particles. Alex Pomarol of the Autonomous University of Barcelona has been looking at how Higgs decays would work if it were a composite particle, and these are consistent with the data so far. ³ Science is a never-ending adventure, where every time you find a Holy Grail, you hear about an even better one just down the road. So far, there are no final answers.

Or, as Charles Fort would have it: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science, or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

The instinct to find a simple, tidy, symmetrical explanation has worked well to date. But the Universe could still get the last laugh: it might turn out to be composed of 93 unrelated sub-sub-subatomic particles that cannot be fitted into any neat human scheme.

NOTES

¹ Interview with Peter Higgs – <http://bit.ly/cbDzZc> (Guardian).

² Democritus quotations – <http://bit.ly/LLgVkp> (todayinsci.com).

³ <http://bit.ly/PcM4gJ> (New Scientist).

PANIC IN THE STREETS

EIGHT-LEGGED ATTACKERS, AND SOMEONE HAS TAKEN TO THE ROOFTOPS TO FIRE DARTS AT PEOPLE IN BROOKLYN



ABOVE LEFT: One of the large spiders from Sadiya, Assam. ABOVE RIGHT: A victim of a modern dart man shows a typical wound. INSET: One of the offending projectiles. BELOW: Brown recluse spiders have been infesting Dylan Baumann's Omaha apartment.

GIANT SPIDER INVASION

As residents of Sadiya, a town in the Tinsukia district of India's Assam state, celebrated a Hindu festival on the evening of 8 May, swarms of hairy spiders appeared and attacked them. Scores of bite victims turned up at the town's hospital, where seven victims were given antibiotics in an attempt to reduce their painful swellings. Over the next few days, a man called Purnakanta Buragohain and an unnamed schoolboy died after witch doctors used razor blades to drain the venom from their bites. It is not known if they were killed by the venom or the attempted treatment, as they were cremated before autopsies could be done. Jintu Gogoi spent a day in the hospital complaining of excruciating pain and nausea after being bitten. He said that weeks later his finger was still black and swollen. District authorities were considering spraying the whole town with the insecticide DDT.

The spiders, roughly the size of an adult's thumb, were noticed at the beginning of May across Tinsukia's grassy plains and dense jungle forests north of the Brahmaputra River. Teams of Indian arachnid experts flocked to the town, hoping to identify the species; some speculated it was a black wishbone or even the feared funnel-web spider. Dr LR

Saikia, an ecologist at Assam's Dibrugarh University, said it might be a previously unknown species of tarantula. "It looks like a new species," he said. "We haven't been able to identify it... It leaps at anything that comes close. Some of the victims claimed the spider latched on to them after biting. If that is so, it needs to be dealt with carefully. The chelicerae and fangs of this critter are quite powerful." Meanwhile, villagers, mostly poor rice farmers in the remote region, were keeping lamps burning at night and standing guard against spiders entering their thatched adobe huts. *dailymail.co.uk*, 3 June; *MX News (Sydney)*, 4 June; *<i>*, 6 June 2012.

● Dylan Baumann's small apartment in Omaha has been infested with at least 40 brown recluse spiders. He has been catching the venomous arachnids for the past four months. They aren't aggressive, but their bites can result in painful wounds – a single bite can lead to hospitalisation. Baumann has moved his bed away from the wall and taken other precautions. The large number of spiders is probably due to a relatively mild winter and higher-than-normal summer temperatures. Baumann said he planned to move out of the apartment in September. *dailymail.co.uk*, 25 July 2012.

RETURN OF DART MAN

A jittery neighbourhood of Brooklyn in New York City was looking over its collective shoulder after three men were shot with blow darts by someone firing from a rooftop at or near Bay 32nd Street and 86th Street in the Bensonhurst district at about 7pm on 20 May. Georgiy Ostrozhnyik, 66, was struck in the stomach and right leg; Ming Chen, 40, was shot in the back and right leg; and a 51-year-old Pennsylvania man was hit in the stomach. The three men – who didn't know each other or have any apparent connection – were treated for minor wounds at Coney Island Hospital and released. Residents were relieved that the shooter didn't add any chemicals or poisons to the darts. Police recovered 10 darts, each about 3in (7.6cm) long.

The incident recalled the bizarre 1990 case of Dart Man,

who used a blow-gun to fire homemade darts into the backsides of more than 50 women in midtown Manhattan. Jerome Wright, 33, a messenger from the Bronx, was arrested for two of the attacks; but the charges were downgraded and then dropped, presumably for lack of sufficient evidence. In 1991, another series of attacks took place in Penn Station. Three people on Long Island were punctured in June and August 1995 [FT85:13]. Six people were hit in Queens, New York, in August 1997; on 26 August, Ryan Winkler, 19, was arrested and charged with these assaults [FT105:12]. There was an earlier spate of attacks in New York State in 1976: a woman was struck in Greenburgh on 23 June and another in Yonkers on 23 July. Police said 17 women had been targeted since the previous February [FT18:16–17]. *NY Daily News*, 22 May 2012.





GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE laments the fiery end of the most haunted house in Bury St Edmunds.



ABBOTT PHOTOGRAPHY

HAUNTED HOUSE FIRE

The late John Keel once mentioned a superstition that haunted buildings eventually burn down. The origins of his claim are obscure, but destruction by fire has just been the fate of the 17th-century Cupola House in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, which in the last four decades held the reputation for being the most haunted house in the town.

Built in 1693, the building derived its name from its hexagonal turret capped with an ornate dome and was a noted landmark for centuries as one of the tallest buildings in the town centre. Originally an apothecary's shop, it was for many years a pub and survived the days of open log fires, candles and oil-lamps. Concerns were raised about the structural safety of the building in the late 1990s, but English Heritage took it off the At Risk Register in 2003 when approval was given for it to be converted into a pizza restaurant. On the night of 16 June 2012, it caught fire, with diners being evacuated. The ruins were still smouldering when I visited the scene two days later, by which time the turret and the back of the building had collapsed.

This is a serious loss to the heritage of Bury St Edmunds and may also have put paid to the ghosts of the Cupola House, which have been documented since the 1970s. The extensive cellars in the building were long said to be contain the bricked-up entrances to a network of secret tunnels under the town, but probably these were no more than old chalk workings. However, this did not prevent local tradition averring that a ghostly Grey Lady haunted the cellar, supposedly having a clandestine meeting with a monk from the days of St Edmund's Abbey. The story was derived from a self-published 19th-century novella, "The Secret Disclosed: A Story of St Edmund's

Cupola House had the reputation of the most haunted house in town

Abbey" (1862) written by an 18-year-old local woman, Margaretta Greene. In her story, which was claimed as true, a nun named Maude Carew was exploited by her lover, a wicked monk named Bernard, in aiding and abetting a plot to poison Humphrey Duke of Gloucester, brother of Henry VI, in 1447.

While Humphrey did indeed die in the town in February 1447, the cause was apoplexy and the tale in which Maude Carew herself also succumbs to the deadly poison and then returns as "the Grey Lady" to haunt each 24 February is a joyous teenage fiction. Nonetheless, on 24 February 1862 the tale was enough to cause a crowd of 400 people to assemble in the churchyard of St Mary's Church outside Miss Greene's house, a prime example of the mass-ghost hunting phenomenon discussed last issue (**FT291:16-17; 76**). The crowd hoped to witness the materialisation of the Grey Lady, and several claimed they could see "dark, dimly defined forms" amid mounting hysteria as midnight approached.

But once the witching hour had struck and no Grey Lady had appeared, the majority of the mob became convinced the affair was a hoax and began to salute the Greene family house with stones, breaking windows. The mob also pelted Margaretta's nephew John Greene with sticks and stones after he rashly decided to roam the churchyard wrapped in a sheet, either to provoke the disappointed mob

LEFT: The 17th-century Cupola House in Bury St Edmunds, which burned down on 16 June.

further or to try to placate them. Eventually, order was restored by the police.

Margaretta never wrote a book again, though in her obituary it was recognised she had succeeded in investing the Abbey ruins with a lasting atmosphere of mystery and romance. In 1901, Cambridge antiquarian and ghost story writer MR James (see pp30-36) excavated the area around St Mary's churchyard and turned up the graves of mediæval abbots. Soon after, stories of phantom monks began to circulate in old houses near the Abbey ruins and around its gateway...

Nonetheless, it is ultimately a tribute to the durability of the Maude Carew legend that sightings of a ghostly Grey Lady have continued sporadically at no less than six locations in Bury St Edmunds. It appears "the Grey Lady" may just have been a convenient local label to apply to otherwise anonymous manifestations. Links with the Cupola House began when the story was given new impetus after being recounted in *Psychic News* in August 1973 and then repeated in good faith in Andrew Green's book *Phantom Ladies* (1975). Initially, the cellar of Cupola House was reportedly being haunted by the figure of a monk from the story, but within a few years the Grey Lady herself had migrated there. In October 1993, landlord Roger Stone told the *East Anglian Daily Times* that an unexplained figure of a woman had been witnessed in the bar, and a strange shape seen in the cellars.

Four subsequent licensees and a number of staff also told me of their experiences at the Cupola House between 1997 and 2003. These included Mr and Mrs Lloyd, who shortly after taking over the pub in the 1990s heard noises of furniture being moved and footsteps on the stairs, as well as glimpsing a strange light at the top of the building. On the night of 20 February 2000, a barman was shaken by seeing the figure of a woman in an "old-fashioned white dress" standing at the foot of the stairs and looking directly at him. His description suggested a Victorian or Edwardian lady rather than a mediæval nun, appearing only four days before the Grey Lady was traditionally due in Miss Greene's story. The apparition was not visible to anyone else and he was so upset he asked to be transferred to another nearby pub immediately.

The next licensees at the Cupola, a Mr and Mrs Holmes, reported strange experiences, and on 10 October 2000 Claire Holmes had a tactile impression of walking into a female presence on the central wooden staircase. Peter Kingston took over the following year and heard the sound of a child coughing in the cellar and experienced odd poltergeist incidents, including that old pub favourite, interference with beer taps and flows. In June 2001, members of the Ghost Club held an all-night vigil with an American member, Joanne Kelly, experiencing what she felt was a chilling

female presence on the staircase, although at that stage she had not heard of Mrs Holmes's experience. One of the last licensees, Marian Thomas, also complained of interference with the mechanism of lager barrels in the cellar and had the impression of someone sitting on the barrel. Minor poltergeist phenomena were also reported in 2006–2007.

With the Cupola House now gutted by the fire and – at the time of writing – doubts as to whether the building can be saved, it remains to be seen whether this calamity has exorcised the ghosts or driven them elsewhere. Will there be reports of “the Grey Lady” transferring her attentions to a new location?

Sources: *Bury Free Press*, 1–15 Mar 1862; *Bury Free Press*, 22 June 2012; Leonard Thompson: *Old Inns of Suffolk*, 1946; John Keel: *Operation Trojan Horse*: 1970; *Psychic News*, 10 Aug 1973; *East Anglian Daily Times*, 27 Oct 1993; Alan Murdie: *Haunted Bury St Edmunds*, 2007; BBC Suffolk website, 22 Oct 2008.

SPIRIT COMMUNICATIONS

Observers of the ghost scene may have noted that the daughter of the singer Whitney Houston who died in February has reported a phenomenon often associated with hauntings and recent bereavements. Speaking on an edition of the Oprah Winfrey show broadcast in the United States in March, Bobbi Kristina, 19, said that she believes the spirit of Whitney is still with her. She said: “Throughout the house lights turn on and off, and I’m like, ‘Mum, what are you doing?’”

Bobbi places this squarely within a framework of the survival of her mother’s spirit and feels she is being contacted by the dead singer. “I can still laugh with her and still talk to her. I can hear her voice telling me, ‘Keep moving, baby, I got you.’ She’s always with me. I can always feel her with me.”

Survival researchers will have heard of similar claims of anomalous electrical activity, lights being switched on and off, particularly from the recently bereaved. An engineer in Connecticut named Gary Galka claims to have gone even further, successfully recording the voice of his deceased daughter, Melissa saying, “Hi Daddy, I love you” some eight years after she died in a car accident.

Gary and wife Heather and two other daughters, Jennifer and Cindy, claim they started to experience unexplained phenomena at their Connecticut home days after the fatal accident in September 2004. These included the doorbell ringing, the TV changing channels and “turning lights on and off”. These developed into physical sensations, including being tapped on the shoulder, someone calling out their names, and the sensation of being kissed – a rarity in reports, it may be noted. Several members of the family also believe they have seen Melissa’s apparition since. Following these experiences, Gary Galka has gone on to develop a series of electromagnetic devices that he says allow him to communicate with his daughter, and to create other paranormal detection devices which he sells to aspiring ghost-hunters. These devices cost between \$79 and \$350 and he calls them ‘Mel Meters’ in memory of his daughter. He donates one-third of the profits from the sale of his paranormal detectors to bereavement groups. Time will tell if these claims can be independently verified. Sources: *Eve. Standard*, Sun, 9 Mar; *D.Mail*, 24 April 2012.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

158. TURKEY DROWSY

The myth

The reason you fall asleep after a traditional Xmas (or, in the US, Thanksgiving) turkey dinner is that the meat contains a natural sedative, called tryptophan.



HUNT EMMERSON

The “truth”

Many people do become sleepy after feasting on turkey, and turkey does contain tryptophan. However, there is no connection between these two facts – despite this being the one thing every US resident knows about Thanksgiving. Tryptophan is an amino acid, essential to human health, and found in a wide range of animal and vegetable foods. Turkey corpses are a good, though by no means unusually rich, source; soya beans, for instance, contain much higher levels. Our bodies use tryptophan to produce serotonin, which (amongst other functions) helps us sleep. Indeed, tryptophan has been used pharmaceutically as a treatment for insomnia. But to get that sort of effect, you’d need to take it in high doses, on an empty stomach, and “undiluted” by other amino acids. It is simply impossible for tryptophan, as an ingredient in a foodstuff, to cause immediate drowsiness or sleep. There are various possible causes of “Turkey Drowsy”, such as the tendency for festive meals to be much larger than usual, to involve more alcohol, and to include unaccustomed quantities of carbohydrate-rich vegetables; these release insulin, which makes the tryptophan already stored in your body more effective.

Sources

<http://bit.ly/6mYlXu> (news.nationalgeographic.com/); <http://bit.ly/NcvtLy> (bidmc.org).

Disclaimer

Of course, the *real* reason we fall asleep after Xmas Dinner is to avoid having to converse with our relatives. But if you can add to, or correct, any of the gourmet morsels in this banquet of gastro-science, please serve your platter on the letters pages.

Mythchaser

A reader asks a simple question, which he assures me will provoke no controversy whatsoever: is it, or is not, a myth that Britain’s climate is determined by the Gulf Stream?



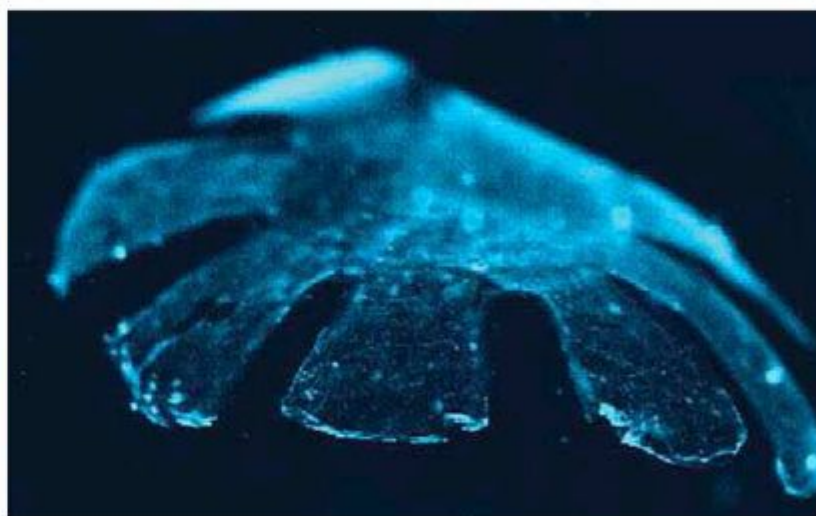
FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:

www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters



JELLYFISH ROUND-UP

Medusa mysteries are making the news



MYSTERY JELLYFISH

A mysterious creature was filmed by a remote-controlled capsule at an unknown location and posted online. *FT*'s cryptozoological expert Dr Karl Shuker identified it as "the little-known deepsea scyphozoan jellyfish *Deepstaria enigmatica*, formally described by science in 1967. The video of it on YouTube clearly reveals its characteristic surface network of radial canals (extensions of the creature's gastric cavity) and its distinctively shaped gonads. Unlike many jellyfishes, which maintain their characteristic bell shapes, this species can change shape quite noticeably via a peristaltic mode of movement, and can also purse the margin of its bell, as seen in the video. Its eversion and apparent undulations are being caused by the currents emanating from the nearby submarine."

SILICONE-BASED MEDUSOID

Bioengineers at Caltech and Harvard University have constructed an artificial jellyfish (dubbed a medusoid) as a way of understanding the "fundamental laws of muscular pumps". They used silicone polymer as a base on which to grow heart muscle cells harvested from rats. The result looks like a flower with eight petals – but as Kit Parker, the Harvard scientist who directed the study, put it: "Genetically, this thing is a rat".



Because jellyfish use a muscle to pump their way through the water, they function on a basic level rather like a human heart – which makes them a good biological system for using as a study model in tissue engineering.

The scientists worked for years to understand jellyfish propulsion, including the arrangement of their muscles, how their bodies contract and recoil, and how fluid dynamics helps or hinders their locomotion. Having fashioned a jellyfish-shaped body from

The muscle cells started to contract a bit on their own

silicone, they printed on it a pattern made of protein resembling the musculature of the real animal. They then grew the heart muscle cells on top, with the protein pattern serving as a map for the growth and organisation of the rat tissue, which allowed them to turn the cells into a coherent swimming muscle. When they set the medusoid free in a container of electrically conducting fluid, they used an electric current to shock it into swimming with synchronised contractions that

TOP LEFT: An artist's impression of jellyfish aliens. TOP RIGHT: The artificial medusoid. LEFT: Deepsea scyphozoan jellyfish *Deepstaria enigmatica*. BELOW: Jack Brody's Essex UFO.

mimic those of real jellyfish. The muscle cells even started to contract a bit on their own before the current was applied. *Nature*, 22 July; *BBC News*, 23 July 2012.

AERIAL JELLYFISH 1

The day after the last issue of *Fortean Times* with its cover illustration of aerial jellyfish went to press, reports arrived at Fortean Towers that Maggie Aderin-Pocock, a satellite expert and government adviser, speculates that extraterrestrial life might look like "football-field sized jellyfish, complete with onion-shaped appendages and an orange underbelly or bottom". The lead scientist with space company Astrium made her announcement as part of Science Month on the Eden television channel. Much of her inspiration came from extremophiles, strange life forms recently discovered around hydrothermal vents on the ocean floor. She said that the creatures, floating in the atmosphere of a Jupiter-like planet, could be generated from silicon rather than the carbon that is the basis of life on Earth (first proposed in the 1890s by astrophysicists and chemists, but later a science fiction trope), and could live off light absorbed through their 'skin' (as claimed by the 'Breatharians') and chemicals sucked in through their giant mouths. Perhaps they could communicate

using pulses of light. The orange underside might act as camouflage, allowing them to escape predators in a fiery atmosphere, while the onion-like appendages act as buoyancy sacs, taking in and letting out gas so it can gain or lose altitude like a hot air balloon. Dr Aderin-Pocock thought there was little chance of making contact with such creatures, as (according to her) the right conditions to support life were few and far between in the Universe. But then – what do we know? *dailymail.co.uk*, 6 July 2012.

AERIAL JELLYFISH 2

Something vaguely resembling an aerial jellyfish (but without tentacles) was photographed by 11-year-old Jack Brody in Loughton, near Epping Forest in Essex, in late May. He was playing in the garden of the family home when he noticed a tiny object glittering in a clear sky, and ran inside for his camera. Jack's father Simon pointed out the circular object to a friend and called the police, who sent two officers to investigate. "It was spooky," said Mr Brody, 39, a property investor. "When a plane came near, it vanished in a flash. We just couldn't work out what it was. It was a kind of silver circular thing. We've heard some people say that it must be a weather balloon, but the way it moved, I just don't think it could have been."

Four years ago, Mr Brody was among a number of people who reported a fast-moving object in the sky above Charlie Brown's roundabout in South Woodford, Essex; and files recently released by the Ministry of Defence include reports of a large red and green star-shaped object over Loughton in 1993 and a silver "tennis ball-shaped craft" that followed the family of a Chigwell woman for more than an hour the same year. Essex has seen a lot of recent UFO activity, apparently. Andy Mannion, described as a "UFO hunter", said that more than 20 sightings in Essex and London had been logged in May alone. *Sun*, 31 May; *Epping Guardian*, 14 June 2012.



GOODBYE, LONESOME GEORGE

Some time in the early hours of 24 June 2012, Lonesome George died and, with his passing, so too did an entire reptilian subspecies – the Pinta (or Abingdon) Island Galapagos giant tortoise *Chelonoidis nigra abingdoni*. As the world's last-known surviving individual of this distinctive saddle-back-shelled form, Lonesome George became a major wildlife celebrity after being discovered on the island in March 1972, the first of his subspecies to be found alive for many years – and, as it turned out, the last one too. For although the presence of tracks on Pinta indicating the existence there of additional specimens had been found when Lonesome George was encountered, none was ever discovered.

To safeguard him, he was transferred to the much larger Galapagos island of Santa Cruz, where he remained at the Charles Darwin Research Institute. Efforts were made to mate him with females of other Galapagos giant tortoise subspecies in the hope of preserving his genes in future generations of hybrid specimens, but without success. Artificial insemination also failed. It is unclear whether his tissues will be preserved for possible cloning attempts. Lonesome George was around 100 years old (quite young, as giant tortoises can live to about twice that age). He had been loyally cared for by his personal keeper, Fausto Llerena, throughout his four decades at the research institute. <http://bit.ly/OKYKV8> (*guardian.co.uk*) 25 June 2012.

FAREWELL, OLIVER

Lonesome George was not the only animal celebrity who left us in June 2012. Closely linked to cryptozoological speculation throughout his time in the spotlight was Oliver, or, as he was nicknamed during the height of his fame in the 1970s, Ape-Man Oliver [FT17:11, 91:47, 95:15]. Acquired in 1960 when approximately two years old by animal trainers Frank and Janet Berger,

and later appearing on many television shows, this enigmatic primate was bald, habitually bipedal, distinctly attracted to women, and possessed of unnervingly human mannerisms and intellect – so much so that he incited considerable dispute as to his precise taxonomic identity. Various observers speculated that he was surely more than a mere chimpanzee, with some opinions ranging from the dramatic to the downright bizarre – everything from an unknown species of ape or a surviving species of prehistoric australopithecine proto-human to a mini-sasquatch or even a humanzee (human/chimpanzee hybrid). However, a series of comprehensive genetic and morphological analyses published in 1998 confirmed that Oliver was nothing more than a West African chimp after all, with his behavioural idiosyncrasies due to external influences [FT120:48–49].

From 1977 onwards, Oliver was owned by a succession of trainers and exhibitors, but in 1989 he was sold to a Pennsylvania laboratory that leased out animals for scientific and cosmetic testing. Mercifully, however, he was never leased out or used, though he spent almost a decade confined in a small cage that eventually induced muscular atrophy. Happily, in 1998 he was transferred to a Texas animal sanctuary called Primarily Primates, where he spent the remainder of his life in peaceful retirement inside a spacious open-air enclosure. He died of old age on 2 June 2012, aged about 55. His body was cremated and his ashes spread over the grounds of the sanctuary where, after a tumultuous, controversial life, the chimp that had made a chump out of so many 'experts' and media folk finally found contentment, security, and dignity. <http://bit.ly/KmHrBg> (*mysanantonio.com*) 2 June 2012.

THE BUMBLEBEE GECKO

One of the latest animal species to have been discovered by science is the eyecatching bumblebee gecko. Named after its unique and very bold black-and-yellow striping, this 5in (13cm)-long species belongs to a genus of slender-toed geckos (thereby lacking the suction-pads famously present on the toes of many other geckos), and inhabits Manus – a small, little-explored island off northeastern New Guinea. The first scientifically documented specimens were two that some local Nali people brought to San Diego biologist Dr Robert Fisher when he was conducting field research there in 2010. (In best cryptozoological fashion, this species was very familiar to the local people, even though it had remained unknown to science until then.) In the 4 April 2012 issue of the journal *Zootaxa*, Fisher and Prof. George Zug of Washington DC's National Museum of Natural History formally described the bumblebee gecko, dubbing it *Nactus kunan* ('kunan' is Noli for 'bumblebee'). <http://bit.ly/JkxiIN> (*news.nationalgeographic.com*) 23 April 2012.

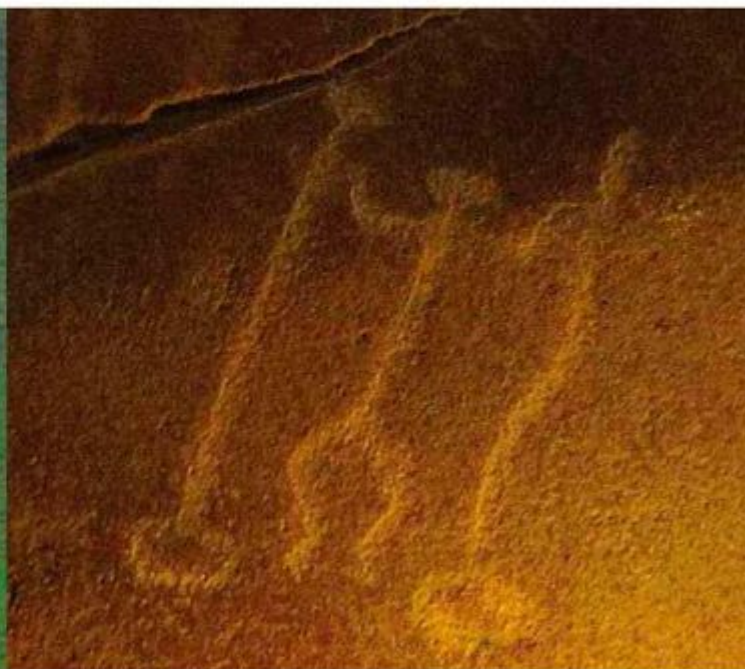




ARCHAEOLOGY

Our archaeological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, a founding co-editor of the peer-review *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.bergpublishers.com).

COINCIDENCE?



PAUL DEVEREUX

ABOVE LEFT: The Long Man of Wilmington. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A similar figure can be seen on the Onega Rock in the Hermitage, St Petersburg, Russia.

The Long Man of Wilmington is a hill figure in south-east England. It is certainly ancient, and presents the featureless, frontal outline of a human figure some 230ft (70m) long cut into a grassy slope revealing the white chalk surface beneath (actually, the outline is now preserved with white concrete blocks). The figure appears to be holding two uprights; they are clearly incomplete, now being reduced to simple straight lines, and there has been much speculation as to what they originally represented. Spears? Staffs? Scythes? Up until the 19th century, the feature was partially overgrown and known as the “Green Man”. From antiquarian (largely contradictory and probably fanciful) sketches, it seems it may once have had facial features and

a helmet, holding spears or farm implements, but none of this is certain. On a different tack, Alfred Watkins, originator of the ley idea in the 1920s, thought the Long Man represented the prehistoric “dod man” or surveyor, holding surveying poles with which he laid out the old straight tracks by line of sight. But the Long Man remains mute, guarding the actual answer.

Now let us travel 1,300 miles (2,090km) northeast to St Petersburg in Russia. Inside the great Hermitage Museum there, lies the Onega Rock – a large block broken off a cliff-face near the shores of Lake Onega. It is covered with dozens of Neolithic carvings – petroglyphs – depicting animals, human figures, sleighs, and seemingly abstract images. Your columnist viewed

the rock recently, and noticed one carving, about 6in (15cm) tall, depicting the frontal outline of a human figure holding two upright objects. It is not clear what these represent – one, at least, seems to have what could be a spearhead on it, but both appear to have rings or stands at their bases. Is there some connection in subject matter between this carving and the Long Man, despite them being so far apart, both geographically and in terms of scale? Can study of the Onega Rock help us prise open the Long Man’s secret? Or is it a mere coincidence (in which case we have two puzzles rather than one)? Either way, readers of this column are the first to be given the chance to be tantalised by the question. Any ideas?

VANDALS STRIKE THE STONE OF DESTINY

The Hill of Tara in County Meath, Ireland, was the royal seat of the pre-Christian Celts, where the rituals of kingship were conducted. Tara is a multi-period site, and monuments from the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages are to be found on its grassy summit. One of these features is a solitary standing stone known as the *Lia Fail*, the Stone of Destiny. The tradition was that during the kingship ceremony, the candidate monarch would touch the stone and if he was



RIGHT: The *Lia Fail* on the Hill of Tara before it was damaged.

BOTH PIX: PAUL DEVEREUX

the rightful one the stone would cry out. (One wonders if this lore is vestigial folk memory that this granite pillar had been a lithophone, a rock that rings when struck, before it was inserted into the ground and its resonance damped.)

The *Lia Fail* is a shaped, phallic monolith, complete with a urethra opening marked on its top. The vandalism involved it being hit around the top about 11 times by a heavy object like a hammer. The large, ragged marks of the blows are visible against the stone's weathered surface but, interestingly, no stone fragments have been found. They seem to have been gathered up, but for what purpose? It was fairly common in centuries past for people to knock pieces off standing stones to take home for good luck. (The strange shape of the King Stone at Rollright, near Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire, is due to this practice.) More likely, in this case, if it wasn't sheer mindlessness, the vandalism was a misbegotten act to collect pieces for fertility magic of some kind. Whatever the reason, the perpetrator should be aware of another piece of firmly established folklore: disturbing or damaging a standing stone will cause the miscreant to be dogged by ill-luck all the rest of his or her days. *Irish Examiner*, 14 June 2012.

MYSTERIOUS WELSH STRUCTURE

Archaeologists have uncovered the foundations of a huge ancient timber structure in southeast Wales. Up to 4,000 years old, it is unlike anything else seen in prehistoric Britain. Three massive timber beams once lay parallel with one another at the edge of a former lake, and each one is over 3ft (1m) wide and about 50ft (15m) long – possibly longer, as excavation is still under way. The discoverers think it may have been part of a huge causeway leading to an artificial island (crannog) in the centre of the former lake, but right now no one knows what the structure is for certain. Work on it, including radiocarbon dating, continues. *Western Mail*, *BBC News*, 13 June; *MSNBC*, 22 June 2012.

CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

154. ANCIENT FACE BOOKS

“Fort was built more like a walrus than like a warrior” – Damon Knight, *Books*, pxiii

Some ancient addenda to David Hambling's excellent sketch of the history of physiognomy (FT265:16). To avoid a referential avalanche – this will please a certain anonymous FT ‘blogger’ – go to Elizabeth Cornelia Evans's ‘Roman Descriptions of Personal Appearance’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 46, 1935, pp43–84, and subsequent book *Physiognomics in the Ancient World* (Philadelphia, 1969) for detailed discussion and exhaustive inventory of ancient sources.

Pythagoras was the reputed founder of this pseudo-science, soon endorsed by Hippocrates. Aristotle frequently invokes it, albeit the treatise *Physiognomonika* that passes under his name may be spurious. Emperor Hadrian's friend, the sophist Polemo, penned a handbook on the subject. Only one sentence of the Greek original survives, but we have Arabic and Latin translations.

Hambling rightly adduces the case of Socrates (below), whose reputation as the ugliest man in Athens was used against him at his trial, as an example of ‘scientific’ perversion. This is something that can be traced back to Homer: the bolshie squaddie Thersites (*Iliad*, bk2) is “the ugliest of the Greeks”.

Some Romans ridiculed the whole business. “What's in a face?” asked Juvenal (*Satire* 2 v8), significantly when excoriating male homosexuals, thus evoking modern stereotypes of the ‘mincing effeminate queer’ – Step Forward, Julian Clary. Pliny, *Natural History*, bk11 ch114 paras273–4, thought it a lot of rubbish, albeit he did catalogue imperial ocular qualities – the eyes had it. Among his many ridiculed examples is the notion that big ears denote brainless chatterboxes – being myself auricular in the manner of Dumbo and Mr Spock, I refrain from comment.

Ancient physiognomy was applied to the entire body, not just faces, as in physical descriptions of Roman emperors by Suetonius and the *Augustan History*. Not that physiognomy was the only issue. There was simple human interest, allied to nomenclature. A Roman's cognomen, traced back ancestrally, frequently connoted some physical trait, e.g. the poets Horatius (Horace) Flaccus (Big-Ears) and Ovidius (Ovid) Naso (Long-Nose).

This ‘holistic’ approach produced distinctly mixed bags. Some Suetonian examples follow (cf.

my *Suetonius*, Amsterdam, 1983, for extended treatments – one of the biographer's lost works was a catalogue of physical defects). Augustus's bright eyes, blondish curls, and compact body betokened leonine qualities, yet his body was covered with ringworm, spots, and birthmarks shaped like the Ursa Major constellation. The broodingly malevolent Tiberius had stiff gait and frowning countenance, plus left-hand fingers so strong they could penetrate a boy's skull with one flick. Caligula's skinny frame, hollow eyes, and bald pate suitably conformed to the characteristics of a panther, anciently considered the meanest and cruellest of beasts. For good measure, he amplified his features' ugliness by practising terrifying expressions before a mirror – an early exponent of body language.

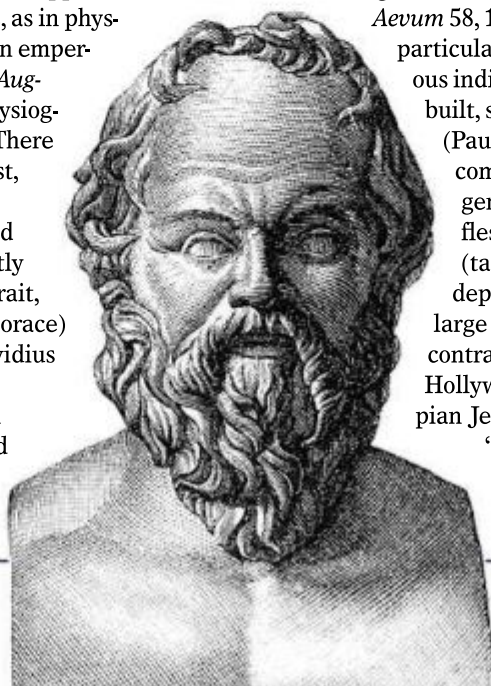
For late Roman and Byzantine imperial traits, see my article in *Byzantion* 51 (1981), pp8–21. Julian is predictably the best case of physiognomical propaganda. His every physical attribute in the admiring Ammianus (*History*, bk15. ch8 para16) is open to the best interpretation, in the hostile Gregory Nazianzenus (*Oration* 5 para23) to the worst. Similar trends are observable in Zeno's peculiar flapping knee-caps – they enabled this alleged coward to flee battles at full tilt – and Anastasius's differently coloured eyes suiting his religious unorthodoxy.

Byzantines wontedly conflated the classical old and the Christian new. Some produced fanciful descriptions of Homeric characters, rather in the manner of police Wanted posters. Helen's beauty (did Goethe know this?) was imagined flawed by a mole on her left breast. Does Kylie Minogue have one on her left buttock? – alas, I shall never know. With equal lack of any evidence, they also devised identikit descriptions of Christ, Mary, the Apostles, and early Church Fathers, both as a guide for religious artists and fulfilling a natural Christian desire to know what their heroes looked like. Full details in my

‘Images of Christ and Byzantine Beliefs’, *Aevum* 58, 1984, pp144–8. Christ (many particular traits are shared by various individuals) comes out as well-

built, sharp-eyed, prominent nose (Paul, too), curly-haired, fair complexion, black-bearded, generally wheat-coloured flesh, and long-fingered (taking after Mary, also depicted as round-faced and large of hand). Compare and contrast the fizzogs of the various Hollywood and European thespian Jesuses.

“At 50, everyone has the face he deserves” – George Orwell, 1949 Notebook





ASTRONOMICAL BULLETIN

Noisy Northern Lights, a disappearing dust disc, plus the re-emergence of Planet X in observers' sights



GETTY IMAGES / URIEL SIVAI

CELESTIAL APPLAUSE

For centuries, folktales and reports by wilderness travellers have described sounds associated with the Aurora Borealis (or Northern Lights), but these reports were traditionally greeted with scepticism by astronomers. However, according to a new study, the energetic particles in the solar wind that create the dancing, dazzling light shows high up in Earth's atmosphere also produce strange 'clapping' noises just 230ft (70m) from the ground. Earth's magnetic field lines funnel the solar wind over the planet's poles, causing the Northern Lights in the Northern Hemisphere and the Southern Lights, or Aurora Australis, in the south.

"In the past, researchers thought that the Aurora Borealis was too far away for people to hear the sounds it made," said Unto Laine from Aalto University in Finland. "This is true; however, our research proves that the source of the sounds associated with the Aurora Borealis we see is

Aurora noises include claps, crackles and muffled bangs

likely caused by the same energetic particles from the Sun that create the Northern Lights far away in the sky. These particles or the geomagnetic disturbance produced by them seem to create sound much closer to the ground."

Laine and his colleagues determined the location of the clapping noise by comparing sounds captured by three microphones set up at a site with high auroral activity. Simultaneous measurements made by the Finnish Meteorological Institute showed a typical pattern of Northern Lights episodes at the time. Auroral sounds don't occur during every Northern Lights outburst, and they're usually brief and faint, requiring

careful listening and a minimum of background noise to be heard. Scientists still aren't sure how they are created. They can be quite variable, ranging from claps and crackles to muffled bangs and sputtering sounds. Because of this sonic diversity, several different mechanisms might be at work. The new study was published in the *Proceedings of the 19th International Congress on Sound and Vibration*, a conference that met in Vilnius, Lithuania, from 8 to 12 July 2012. *space.com*, 9 July 2012. For more dramatic photographs of the Aurora Borealis, see FT174:6-7.

VANISHING ACT

An extraordinary amount of dust around a nearby star has mysteriously disappeared. "It's like the classic magician's trick – now you see it, now you don't – only in this case, we're talking about enough dust to fill an inner solar system, and it really is gone!" said Carl Melis, a postdoctoral scholar at UC San Diego and lead author of the research (published in *Nature*

on 5 July). "It's as if the rings around Saturn had disappeared," said his co-author Benjamin Zuckerman, a UCLA professor of physics and astronomy. "This is even more shocking because the dusty disc of rocky debris was bigger and much more massive than Saturn's rings. The disc around this star, if it were in our Solar System, would have extended from the Sun halfway out to Earth, near the orbit of Mercury... Nothing like this has ever been seen in the many hundreds of stars that astronomers have studied for dust rings. This disappearance is remarkably fast, even on a human time scale, much less an astronomical scale."

The cosmic vanishing act occurred around a star designated TYC 8241 2652, some 450 light years from Earth, in the direction of the constellation Centaurus. The dust had been present since at least 1983 (no one had observed the star in the infrared before then), and it continued to glow brightly in the infrared for 25 years. In 2009, it started to dim. By 2010, the dust emission was gone; the astronomers observed the star twice that year from the Gemini Observatory in Chile (facing page), six months apart. An infrared image obtained by the Gemini telescope as recently as 1 May 2012 confirmed that the warm dust has now been gone for two and a half years. "[The disappearance] appears to be independent of the star itself, as there is no evidence to suggest that the star zapped the dust with some sort of mega-flare or any other violent event," said Melis. *sciencedaily.com*, 5 July 2012.

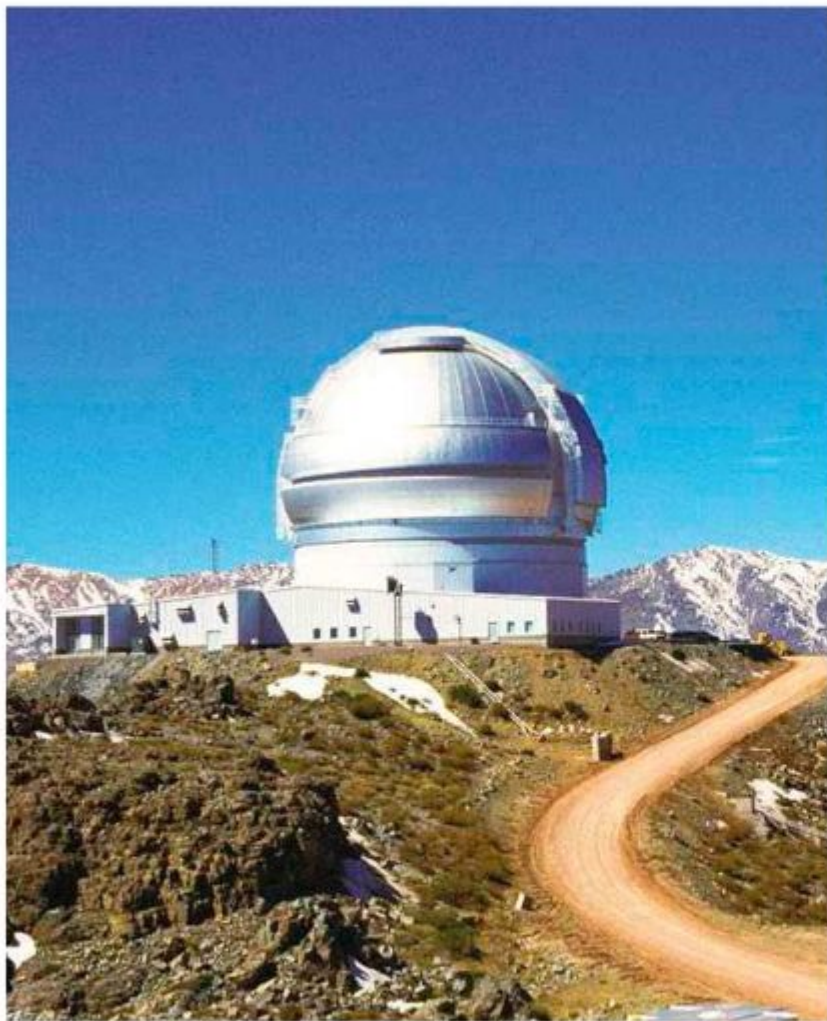
PLANET X AGAIN?

A hefty planet may be skirting the edge of the Solar System beyond Pluto, according to new research by Rodney Gomes, an astronomer at the National Observatory of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. Too distant to be easily spotted by Earth-based telescopes, it could account for several orbital anomalies. For several years, astronomers

have observed that a handful of the small icy bodies that lie in the so-called “scattered disc” beyond the orbit of Neptune, including the dwarf planet Sedna, deviate from the paths around the Sun that would be expected based on the gravitational pulls of all the known objects in the Solar System. Sedna, for example (FT184:4-5), swings round the Sun in an extremely elongated orbit. However, when Gomes ran the same calculations with the addition of the gravitational pull of a massive planet on the outskirts of the Solar System, all the apparently anomalous orbits fell in line with observations. Several planet types could fit the observations: for example, a Neptune-sized planet, about four times bigger than Earth, orbiting 140 billion miles (225 billion km) away from the Sun, or a Mars-sized planet with a highly elongated orbit, always well beyond Pluto’s orbit. Though Gomes’s work has not yet been peer-reviewed, his colleagues are confident he has got the maths right.

The existence of Neptune was

hypothesised at the turn of the 19th century, long before the gas giant was seen through a telescope in 1846, because of the way it was perturbing the orbit of Uranus. On the other hand, many astronomers spent much of the 20th century searching for an extra planet, dubbed ‘Planet X’, beyond the orbit of Neptune, because they believed there were anomalies in the orbits of Neptune and the other gas giants – but it turned out that the anomaly in Neptune’s orbit was the result of bad observation. The search for Planet X was called off (though fans of Zachariah Sitchin believe this was a cover-up of the planet Nibiru, which they say is on a collision course with Earth). An alternative explanation for the orbital anomalies in the outer reaches of the Solar System is that a sister star to our Sun swung by early in the life of the Solar System, causing perturbations before shooting off somewhere else. The controversy will only be settled by actually seeing Gomes’s putative planet. *space.com*, 22 May 2012.



GEMINI OBSERVATORY



KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE,
REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...

THE LINKS BETWEEN CRIME AND THE JFK ASSASSINATION

I first became interested in JFK’s death in 1977, when the House Select Committee on Assassinations was sitting. In those days, copies of the *International Herald Tribune* had just started appearing on sale in the UK and I was thrilled to be able to buy it and read its skimpy reports of the HSCA hearings. I had cutting edge information!

These days, there is more information than we can handle. For example, the City of Dallas has recently put its Kennedy assassination archives online, including thousands of pages of original police reports.¹ Sampling them, Anthony Frewin and I chanced upon two reports in the immediate aftermath of the killing of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby which claimed that Ruby was gay. Others had made the same claim, notably a junkie stripper known as Rose Cheramie, who worked as a heroin courier for Ruby. She predicted the Dallas shooting and then afterwards, told police that Ruby and Oswald had been lovers. When New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison prosecuted gay businessman Clay Shaw (the subject matter of the Oliver Stone movie *JFK*), he claimed he was pursuing the conspiracy to kill Kennedy. In fact, it was the gay subculture he had in his sights.

I am one of a minority of Kennedy assassination buffs who think that it was LBJ whodunit (FT176:32-36); and for us the arrival of the fourth volume of Robert A Caro’s biography of Johnson, *The Passage of Power*, which covers LBJ’s transition from vice president to president, and thus that day in Dallas, has been long awaited. Caro’s first three volumes on Johnson’s earlier career are a remarkable piece of research which showed that Johnson was utterly corrupt and had been so from the get-go. Caro also found that some people in Texas were still afraid to speak openly about the man, even though he had been dead for 30 years. No one expected Caro to denounce Johnson as the man behind the murder, but it seemed likely that Caro’s minutely detailed research would uncover *something* of significance. Well, the book arrived a couple of days ago, and though I haven’t had time to read it, Caro has avoided Johnson’s suggested role in the killing of Kennedy; and to do this he has ignored one of the major corruption stories around Johnson in the 1960s.

Billy Sol Estes, who had been paying off Texas politicians, including LBJ, since the 1950s, was running a huge agricultural subsidies fraud and was being investigated in 1961. As the scam unravelled, people associated with Estes began dying in car exhaust ‘suicides’. So common were these that, by 1963, the local media jokingly referred to death by carbon monoxide poisoning to as a “Texas suicide”. Estes was eventually convicted, went to prison and kept schtum. Out of prison, Estes testified in 1984 at a Grand Jury inquiry into the death of Department of Agriculture official Henry Marshall, who had been murdered in 1961 while investigating the Estes fraud. Despite five gunshot wounds, Marshall’s death in Texas had been ruled a suicide. The 1984 Grand Jury changed that verdict to murder. Estes’s lawyer informed the federal Justice Department that his client had evidence on the murder of eight people, including Marshall and JFK, killed by the Johnson network to keep the lid on this scandal. Estes offered to provide evidence in exchange for immunity but no deal was offered. That Estes, who is still alive, is missing from Caro’s account suggests how sensitive this material still is.²

NOTES

¹ <http://jfk.ci.dallas.tx.us/>

² A good introductory account of the Estes story is at <http://bit.ly/ro9HS3> (spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk).



AP/GETTY IMAGES



NECROLOG

We note the passing of a leading historian of witches in society; a contrarian and freethinker who revitalised research into Rennes-le-Chateau; and an expert on fairies.

PAUL S BOYER

A professor of American history at the University of Wisconsin from 1980 to 2002, Dr Boyer (below) was a lifelong pacifist raised in the Brethren in Christ Church, an offshoot of the Mennonites. He first received wide notice with *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (1974), which suggested that social envy motivated many of the accusers in the 17th-century witch trials. The book, written with Stephen Nissenbaum, made innovative use of land records and tax receipts to show that in many cases the accused were members of Salem's social establishment, if only peripherally, while their accusers were lower-ranking citizens who had tangled with the victims over financial matters. The review in the *Times Literary Supplement* said that the book so radically changed the historical understanding of the episode "that virtually all the previous treatment can be consigned to the historical lumber room".

Boyer's *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (1978) explored the way American leaders and immigrants came to grips with what they saw as the loosening of behavioural norms caused by immigrants' loss of traditional ties to institutions such as church and family. *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (1992) was somewhat ahead of the pack in identifying the growing power of fundamentalist religious groups in the US, and explaining how their millennial views were being incorporated into mainstream political views about international affairs.

Boyer was probably best known for two books about the effect of the US decision to drop atom bombs on Japan in 1945. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (1985) and *Fallout* (1998)



described the Bomb's impact on the American psyche, culture and politics. He showed how the Bomb impelled a generation of scientists to political activism, which helped spark the broad-based anti-nuclear movement of the 1950s and indirectly paved the way for the opposition to the Vietnam War in the 1960s.

Paul Samuel Boyer, historian, born Dayton, Ohio 2 Aug 1935; died Madison, Wisconsin 17 Mar 2012, aged 76.

JOHN MILLAR

Founded in the rush of enthusiasm that followed the success of the seminal *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln in 1982, the Saunière Society – dedicated to Rennes-le-Château and associated mysteries such as the Priory of Sion – was rather directionless and moribund until John and Joy Millar took it over in the mid-1990s. Under John's chairmanship and with Joy's energetic organisation, the Society not only became very active, holding an annual cycle of one-day conferences in London and Kent and weekend events in Scotland, but also expanded to include a panoply of subjects in the fields of religion, the esoteric, alternative history and parapolitics. Basically, if it challenged conventional wisdom, was heretical – or provocative – it was in.

Suddenly, the Saunière Society enjoyed an important role in disseminating alternative ideas and new research. Its stable of speakers included not only well-known names such as Henry Lincoln,

Ahmed Osman and MI5 whistle-blower David Shayler, but the Society also provided a platform for new researchers. And it was no coincidence that with John and Joy at the helm, the Society's get-togethers were noticeably relaxed affairs.

This inclusive

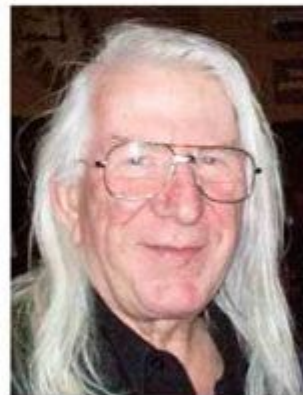
approach arose from John's lifelong crusade for free-thinking, to which he was introduced by his grammar school teacher, the celebrated educationalist and trade unionist Edward (later Sir Edward) Britten. Despising all forms of dogma, John

(above) refused to allow beliefs – his own or anyone else's – to be dictated by others, no matter how great an authority they were (or thought they were), or to reject any idea simply because it didn't fit accepted paradigms. He was Vice President of the National Secular Society and involved in the peace movement and CND in the 1950s and 60s. A familiar figure on his soapbox at Hyde Park's Speakers' Corner, among his fans was Joy, who married him – and John Lennon, who became a regular correspondent. John had a very wide range of interests, all of which he pursued actively and with his own inimitable energy and style.

Encouraged, like most teenagers in World War II, to learn to handle a gun, John discovered an enthusiasm for competitive rifle shooting. This came to an abrupt halt when he lost his left arm in a wartime accident with explosives, which left him in a coma for several days. But, characteristically, he turned instead to pistol shooting, continuing to take part in European competitions into his 70s.

Of Lithuanian ancestry on his father's side, John was an active supporter of Lithuanian independence from the Soviet Union, organising rallies in London. He was also present in Lithuania during the nervy months in the summer of 1991 when, after it became the first Soviet republic to declare its independence, Moscow unsuccessfully tried to reassert its hold by force.

John's other great love was music, characteristically surprising in its depth and scope. A



trumpet player, he was patron of four brass bands, including the Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band and the Grimethorpe Colliery Band. He was also a member of the Wagner Society and a Friend of Bayreuth, even becoming a close friend of the

Wagner family. He was an active charity fund-raiser, concentrating in recent years on the Cystic Fibrosis Trust.

For the Saunière Society, John and Joy organised an annual trip to Rennes-le-Château, which, according to its many fans, left all similar tours standing. The Millars' enthusiasm for the mystery even drew in John's son Chris, better known as Rat Scabies, drummer in the band The Damned (whose Rennes-related adventures are chronicled in Christopher Dawes's 2005 book *Rat Scabies and the Holy Grail: Can a Punk Rock Legend Find What Monty Python Couldn't?*)

John will be remembered not just for his work with the Saunière Society, his extensive and wide-ranging knowledge and his generosity of spirit, but also for his mischievous and irreverent sense of humour. This is best demonstrated by his car's number plate, which announced baldly that the vehicle belonged to 'Treasurer, Priory of Sion'. It certainly raised eyebrows in the car park at Rennes-le-Château.

John Alexander Millar, freethinker and Chairman of the Saunière Society, born Kingston, Surrey, 12 Nov 1929; died Canterbury, Kent, 23 June 2012, aged 82.

Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince

MARJORIE JOHNSON

Marjorie Johnson was one of Britain's premier fairy experts. She had seen her first fairy in her early childhood in a house in Nottingham and her enthusiasm for fairies survived into her adult years. In 1936, she wrote to



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www.forteanimes.com/strangedays/strangedeaths

Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

John O'London's *Weekly* letters page to describe a fairy experience [see 'Modern Fairy Tales' by David Lazell, **FT1:39-41**] and already at that date she was enthusiastically collecting fairy witness accounts. She may have belonged to the Fairy Investigation Society (FIS) in 1936, though this is unlikely. She was certainly a member of the reformed post-war FIS under the extraordinary Quentin Craufurd. Indeed, by 1956 she was its Secretary, a successor to the famous Edwardian medium Claire Cantlon. In this position and with the help of several allies, including the Scottish writer Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, she systematically contacted news outlets asking readers for fairy witness accounts. However, dealing with the media proved dangerous and in 1960 the *Sunday Pictorial*, a British tabloid paper, claimed that Marjorie was studying the sex life of sprites: something she found both wounding and humiliating.

Through the second half of her life, Marjorie's mission was to write up the impressive archive that she had gathered together as a book, provisionally entitled *Fairy Vision*. However, this work, the most impressive corpus of sightings in between Evans-Wentz and Janet Bord, with dozens of fairy accounts, did not find a home. It was only in 2000 that the German publisher Aquamarin Verlag brought it out as *Naturgeister: Wahre Erlebnisse mit Elfen und Zwergen* ("Nature-spirits: Experiences with Elves and Dwarfs") while it was later published in Italian as *Il Popolo del Bosco* ("The People of the Wood", 2004). The result is that one of the fairy books of the last century, with accounts of fairies in London, Lincolnshire and Lothian, cannot be read in English. Marjorie never married and survived her sister Dorothy, fey and loving to the end. *Marjorie Thelma Johnson, expert on fairies, born 24 Feb 1911; died Carlton, Nottingham, 26 Oct 2011, aged 100.*

Simon Young

Editor's note: Simon Young is presently researching the Fairy Investigation Society and would be grateful for any mementos (newsletters, reports etc) or memories at first- or second-hand. <sycourse@yahoo.co.uk>

A SWISS WOMAN IN HER FIFTIES, REFERRED TO as Anna Gut (not her real name), believed she could survive on light alone ('pranic nourishment'). She was influenced by the documentary *In the beginning there was light*, which ran in Swiss cinemas in 2010. This portrayed two men, Michael Werner (62), a Swiss anthropologist with a doctorate in chemistry, and Indian yogi Prahlad Jani (83). Werner claimed to have lived without food since 2001, while Jani said he had lived for 70 years, not only without food but also without water [**FT180:10, 264:10-11**]. Anna Gut also read a book by another proponent of "breatharianism", Australian Ellen Greve (54), who calls herself Jasmuheen, or 'eternal air' [**FT120:14**].

One day last winter, when Anna Gut failed to answer the phone, her children broke down the door to find her dead inside. The autopsy showed that she had died of starvation. Previous 'breatharian' fatalities include Timo Degen (31) from Munich in 1997, Lani Morris (53) from New Zealand in 1998, and Verity Linn, an Australian found emaciated beside a lake in Scotland in 1999 [**FT129:9**]. According to legend, the patron saint of Switzerland – Nikolaus von der Flüe, a 15th-century mystic – lived for 19 years without food and drink. *The Local (Sweden), 25 April 2012.*

ALEX MITCHELL FAMOUSLY DIED LAUGHING while watching an episode of *The Goodies* comedy show on 24 March 1975. The episode, called "Kung Fu Kapers", featured Bill Oddie as a black belt in "Ecky-Thump", a supposed Lancastrian martial art that involved pummelling opponents with black pudding. Tim Brooke-Taylor played a Scotsman who defended himself with bagpipes [FT21:11**]. His widow Nessie said he was in stitches throughout, then "gave a tremendous belly laugh, slumped on the sofa and died". She sent the *Goodies* a letter thanking them for making his final minutes so happy.**

Cardiologists now believe that they have established what caused the death of the

50-year-old Scottish bricklayer, who lived in King's Lynn, Norfolk: he suffered from a rare heart disorder, long QT syndrome, which can induce cardiac arrest when triggered by exertion or adrenalin. They came to this conclusion after Mitchell's granddaughter, Lisa Corke, 23, suffered a cardiac arrest at home on 4 May this year. She was saved by her husband administering CPR before the ambulance arrived, and is now fitted with a defibrillator in her chest. Hospital tests showed that long QT syndrome was hereditary on her father's side. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 21 June 2012.*



A PENTACOSTAL preacher who followed his father into the practice of handling snakes to prove his faith in God died after a timber rattlesnake bit him on the thigh during an outdoor service in Panther State Forest, near Bluefield, West Virginia, on 27 May. Mark Randall 'Mack' Wolford, 44, pastor of the Full Gospel Apostolic House of the Lord Jesus in Matoaka, West Virginia, had survived three previous bites. "Praise the Lord and pass the rattlesnakes, brother," he had written four days before his death. His father had also died after being bitten – in 1983, aged 39. Serpent-handlers cite Mark 16:17-18 as justification for their practice. It is illegal in some states, such as North Carolina and Tennessee. *Washington Post, 30 May; Irish Independent, 1 June; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 2 June 2012.*

ON FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH OF APRIL, 2012, a patient at Darent Valley Hospital in Dartford, Kent, was kicked and bitten to death by a stallion as she took a walk on doctor's orders. The unnamed 53-year-old from nearby Gravesend was repeatedly attacked by the horse, thought to belong to travellers, as she crossed a field. Walkers found her mauled body five hours later with the horse still standing over her. It had to be tranquillised so that police could recover the victim. Her death was not treated as suspicious and the horse was not put down. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 15 April 2012.*



the UFO files

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FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT
THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND
FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

DIRE STRAITS?

The 'space-napping' of Australian pilot Frederick Valentich is now 34 years old and fading rapidly from the memory of all but the most devoted ufologist. It is, however, one of the most puzzling incidents in the history of the subject and one that has defied both the sceptics' explanations and the certainty of believers in ET kidnappers. On the evening of 21 October 1978, while flying his Cessna aircraft from Melbourne to King Island in the Bass Strait, 20-year-old Valentich and his plane vanished and have not been seen since. This would have been just another missing person report were it not for the fact that during the flight the young Australian radioed that an illuminated object was buzzing his aircraft: "A *strange aircraft is hovering on top of me again. It is hovering and it's not an aircraft.*" These were his last words to ground control.

Mystery breeds speculation – and nowhere is this truer than in the field of ufology. Sceptics tried and failed to dismiss the disappearance as pilot error. One of the wilder theories suggested Valentich had become disorientated to the extent that he was flying upside down and mistook a ship for the unusual light that he said was pursuing him. The problem with this theory is the fact that neither Valentich nor the wreckage of the Cessna has ever been found. Nuts and bolts UFO believers naturally leaned toward the disappearance being connected with aliens who abducted both the pilot and his plane. A rash of UFO reports from the same night is often cited in support of this claim. Unfortunately, most of these reports came to light *after* news of Valentich's vanishing became public knowledge, and as such don't carry much weight as supporting evidence. There is, however, a more elegant solution that accounts for the lack of physical evidence and avoids the need to invoke extra-terrestrials. Valentich, who by all accounts had a prior interest in UFOs, could have engineered the whole scenario in a sophisticated fake suicide.

The Australian Department of Transport opened a file on Valentich; it was closed in 1982, but its conclusions remained cloaked in secrecy until June 2012, when Aussie ufologist Keith Basterfield used the Freedom of Information Act to obtain a copy. Unfortunately, the file did little to clarify what



ABOVE: Guido Valentich in 1978, showing a photo of his son Frederick, who had gone missing days before.

happened on that fateful October day. Parts from a Cessna engine cowling that *could* have been from Valentich's plane were found and search planes spotted wreckage and an oil slick, but failed to relocate it. This evidence wasn't enough to persuade the Australian government, and in an Aircraft Accident Investigation Summary Report dated 27 April 1982 they concluded: "The reason for the disappearance of the aircraft has not been determined."

If anything, the release of the Valentich files demonstrates the Australian government's objective treatment of a baffling UFO case, without trying to force-fit an 'explanation'. Refreshingly, they simply didn't know what happened and weren't afraid to say so. FlyingSaucery agrees with Aussie ufologist Bill Chalker's conclusion

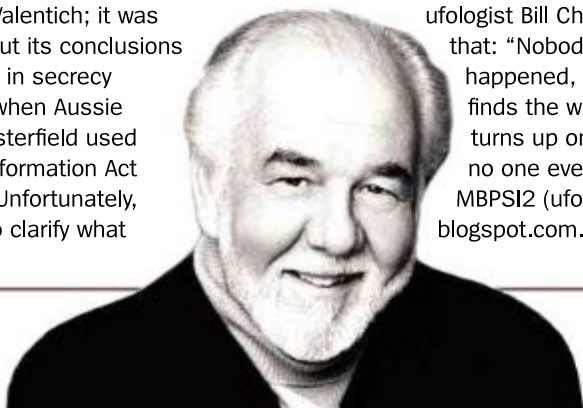
that: "Nobody really knows what happened, and unless someone finds the wreckage, or Valentich turns up one day, probably no one ever will." <http://bit.ly/MBPSI2> (ufos-scientificresearch.blogspot.com.au).

KICKER CONSPIRACY

Another historical – some might say hysterical – UFO case has been in the news again. The 1947 Roswell Incident is, despite what the sceptics say, as unexplained as the Valentich disappearance. But long after the deaths of the key witnesses, the flow of sensational stories from those who were allegedly there, or knew someone who was, continues. 2012's addition to the Roswell mythos are the claims made by someone using the pseudonym 'Chase Brandon' (see also **FT266:32–37**) who claims to be a former CIA agent (and what else could you be with a name like that?).

Toward the end of a 35-year career with the CIA, Brandon (below) says, he just happened to wander into an area of the Agency's headquarters in Langley, Virginia, called the Historical Intelligence Collection. "It was a vaulted area and not everybody could get in it," he told the *Huffington Post*. "One day, I was looking around in there and reading some of the titles that were mostly hand-scribbled summations of what was in the boxes. And there was one box that really caught my eye. It had one word on it: Roswell." Of course, he opened the box and, in a reversal of the *X-Files* dictum, found the truth was *in* there. Roswell "was not a damn weather balloon – it was what it was billed when people first reported it... It was a craft that clearly did not come from this planet, it crashed and I don't doubt for a second that the use of the word 'remains' and 'cadavers' was exactly what people were talking about."

Brandon's wonderful story has excited seasoned Roswell-ologists such as Stanton Friedman, who notes: "It's time for the retirement of the mythical part – where we don't have all the pieces – to be replaced by the true story of what happened: all the details, and we certainly don't have them." Yet just how mythical can Brandon's claims be? His account reads like a modern-day equivalent of a folktale in which the protagonist wanders into a secret cave or building and finds hidden treasure. We remain unimpressed, especially when you consider that the kicker to this story is that Brandon just happens to be embarking on a publicity tour for his first novel, a conspiracy thriller called *The Cryptos Conundrum* about – yes, you've guessed it – the CIA's cover-up of the Roswell UFO crash. Fishy isn't the word! <http://huff.to/NhmVR2> (huffingtonpost.com); www.chasebrandon.com/.



MODERATIONS, PART ONE: LOST AND FOUND FILES

A lot of UFO research revolves around those big cases that achieve fame and are then endlessly debated. However, from time to time, there are incidents that start with the promise of becoming legendary, but are never fully documented. This is the story of two potential classics that didn't set the world of ufology alight. I hope that one day – perhaps even through readers of this magazine – a breakthrough might occur.

We are nearing the end of the release of Ministry of Defence UFO archives and owe a huge debt to David Clarke, who has expertly steered this series of disclosures onto public record. In the latest release (see **FT291:26–27**), one section of file DEFE-24-1984-1 refers to a parliamentary enquiry made in 1996, briefly mentioned by David Clarke and Andy Roberts in their obituary on 'Solway Spaceman' witness Jim Templeton (**FT286:28–29**), whose mysterious photograph of a strange, space-suited entity on the Solway Marshes remains a classic ufological conundrum.

This file intrigues me, as it reveals the MoD effort made in response to a letter from MP James Fraser. One of his constituents had watched a TV documentary that I wrote for BBC2 in April 1996 in which I interviewed Templeton and searched the National Archives for references to a Blue Streak missile launch in Australia that Jim believed had led to the government investigating his photo.

It's unfortunate that nobody at the MoD approached me. Their investigation, started by Michael Portillo and led by Baron Howe, took off from interviews, filming and research that I was then doing alongside the witnesses – and yet none of us even knew that this enquiry had taken place until the release of the new files!

In the MoD record I am termed: "a prominent member of the 'UFO' lobby" (Parliamentary Branch loose minute dated 16 May 1996). I do not consider myself part of any 'lobby', but this sort of thing is the result of ufology's image problem as a field that doesn't always encourage open communication.

Arguments have raged over what occurred ever since Jim Templeton took his photo in May 1964, and the Internet is awash with speculation. When I made my film in 1996, the Templetons said that the police had told them not to ask questions about the matter because the MoD had become involved in their case. This might explain the 1964 press cutting (reproduced **FT286:29**) in which a visit from two men in dark suits driving a Jaguar is made light of. Perhaps Andy and Dave are right and Templeton confabulated the story over later decades; or, as both he and his wife told me in 1996, they really were just doing as the police had asked and not rocking the boat over a matter which was – they believed – secret and in the hands of the government.

Confusion is unquestionably involved in this complex affair, but Blue Streak missiles were assembled near where Jim's famous photo was taken; and at Woomera, in Australia, where these missiles were tested, things *did* actually happen around the time the



LEFT: The MoD's response to MP James Fraser's enquiry about the Templeton photo.

missile was just a blur, wrote in 1996: "If this is the footage over which all the fuss has been made, I can see why the MoD have concluded that it is a lens flare".

However, I discovered some extra facts without MoD assistance. The camera in Australia had a sun-protective hood to guard against lens flare, though the 5 June 1964 Woomera launch film still looks like precisely that. And the reason that there is no analysis on the MoD files is that the lens flare theory was a mere suggestion from someone at Pathé, who admitted to guessing and didn't know what sort of camera had been used.

A loose minute in the MoD files dated 10 May 1996 says that: "Jenny Randles's use of this (film) material was at best selective!" That criticism may well be fair if applied to the TV programme, but doesn't do justice to my contemporary written accounts beyond the BBC deadlines.

In the newly released file DEFE-24-1985-1 is a request from another TV company in June 1996 in which MoD files covering a big event in Lancashire on 24 February 1979 were being sought.

This request from London Weekend Television came via me at the series *Strange But True?*, on which I was story consultant. We planned a programme on this case because it featured a military exercise, police involvement and USAF jets allegedly in pursuit of a UFO. However, we needed recorded evidence, and this new file shows that the MoD then claimed no cases existed from Lancashire on that date, only a couple of unrelated sighting reports from London. So LWT shelved the story.

Curiously, last year, when more MoD files were released, they included a sighting from the *exact date and time* in 1979 that we had sought in 1996. A Royal Ordnance Factory patrol in Blackburn had spotted the UFO we were researching. It is key to this major case (see **FT283:29**). Had that case file been 'found' 15 years earlier when we requested the information, then 12 million viewers on ITV would have been watching!

It's easy to think "Conspiracy!" at times like this – although lost files in multiple locations or lack of resources to thoroughly search them out are more likely explanations. But it should remind us that when it comes to the Templeton/Woomera case we should be very cautious before declaring that we possess all the relevant facts. After all, one of the things I learnt from Jim Templeton was that he had taken a *second* mysterious photo in the summer of 1964...

(To be concluded next issue)

The Templeton photo remains a classic UFO conundrum

Templetons say they were told that the government was investigating.

It seems reasonable to expect official interest in Jim's story, given the alleged associations with defence technology. Yet the extant files reveal none, leaving us with the choice of believing that the events occurred but are recorded elsewhere, perhaps in a file that got misplaced over the decades, or that no official investigation ever happened. In that case, everything – from what the police told the Templetons to the visit by the two strange men – was either coincidental misunderstanding or misremembered fact that grew over time into mythology.

However, while the MoD was secretly searching for answers during summer 1996, so was I, and I documented my findings for the UFO community. I searched the archives for footage of Blue Streak and found that this specific canister had gone missing. I traced the original film back to Pathé, and, seeing that the 'mysterious object' alongside the

A PLEASING TERROR

M R James remains the most celebrated of all writers of ghost stories – but what was his personal attitude to the supernatural? Where did he find his inspiration? And what did he share with Charles Fort? **ROBERT LLOYD PARRY** celebrates the 150th anniversary of the author's birth.

Montague Rhodes James (1862–1936) would have celebrated his 150th birthday on 1 August 2012. Raise a glass to him, forteans. If you're not a fan of his ghost stories already, then I suggest that you get hold of a collection without delay. His earliest tales were published in book form in 1904 and they've not been out of print since.

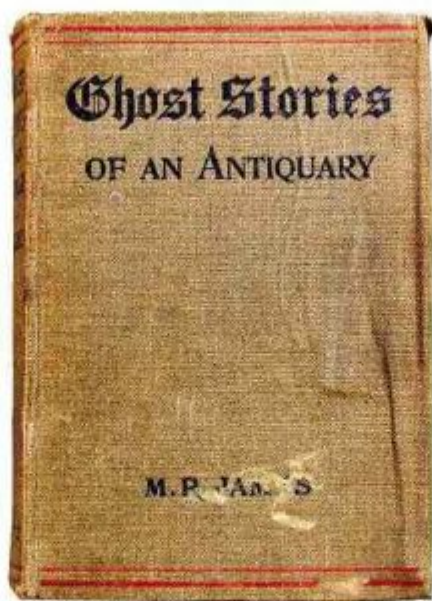
I suspect, however, that if you're reading *Fortean Times*, then you're already familiar with some of James's works. You'll probably know what happens to Dennistoun, a young Cambridge antiquary, when he buys an old book in a strange little town in the French Pyrenees. The mere mention of the name Abney is likely to make you clutch your child's hand that bit more tightly. And even if you've only read a couple of his stories in anthologies, you'll surely be familiar with the sufferings visited upon Parkins, the Professor of Ontography at Cambridge University, when he blows an ancient whistle in his lonely hotel bedroom.

And while you'll be thrilled, the sheer pleasure you feel on finishing one of these supremely well-told tales will probably be mixed with a faint bafflement. The supernatural content of James's stories is rarely, if ever, adequately explained. And therein lies one of their strengths. James's stories exercise the imagination. They invite speculation. They promote doubt.

DAMNED DATA

M R James and Charles Fort were contemporaries and both are remembered today chiefly for their contributions to

JAMES'S GHOST
STORIES INVITE
SPECULATION.
THEY PROMOTE
DOUBT...



the world of supernatural letters. But the differences between the two men were manifold, and James was many things that Fort was not.

He was, for instance, a devout and lifelong member of the Church of

England. The son of a country parson, James's early childhood was spent in the Rectory at Great Livermere in Suffolk, and he absorbed well the Bible readings and prayers that were part of everyday family life. The study of ecclesiastical literature and church decoration dominated his subsequent career, and later in life he became, like his father, a notable preacher, though he was never ordained. He was academically brilliant, and his gifts in this direction were clear from a young age.

A contemporary at his prep school recalled the pre-pubescent James sitting at the edge of the cricket field laughing out loud to himself as he read Aris-tophanes in the original Greek. And as a 16-year-old Eton schoolboy, he taught himself Ethiopic so he could present his own translation of an Apocryphal Old Testament book, *The Rest of the words of Baruch*, to Queen Victoria. The lovingly dedicated manuscript never reached Her Majesty, but her courtiers were not amused, and his Head Master, Dr Hornby, was "exceedingly annoyed at the conceit and bad taste of the proceeding".

This was one of the few times in his life that James ever got into trouble with the authorities, however, and for the rest of his life he was a revered member of the British educational establishment. He held a succession of high academic posts until his death in 1936: Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University and, uniquely, Provost of both King's College, Cambridge, and Eton. In 1930, George V awarded him the Order of Merit "in recognition of his scholarship and of his eminent contributions to Mediæval Learning".

And he was at his best, I think, a



CELEBRATING M R JAMES

ON THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF M R JAMES, *FT* ASKED SOME OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST CONTEMPORARY EXPONENTS AND EXPERTS IN THE FIELD OF SUPERNATURAL FICTION TO ASSESS HIS GENIUS AND INFLUENCE

RAMSEY CAMPBELL, BRITAIN'S MOST CELEBRATED LIVING HORROR WRITER, EDITOR AND CRITIC, AUTHOR OF OVER 40 BOOKS



M R James remains the most influential British writer of supernatural fiction, best known for his four books of ghost stories: *Ghost-Stories of an Antiquary* (1904), *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1911), *A Thin Ghost and Others* (1919), and *A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories* (1925), all included in *The Collected Ghost Stories of MR James* (1931, frequently reprinted since).

His writings on the ghost story were sparse but valuable. The most substantial as a survey appeared in the December 1929 issue of *The Bookman*, where James demonstrates his familiarity with the genre, even tracing the roots of *Dracula* to (apparently) a sceptical article on vampirism from the November 1856 issue of *Chambers's Repository*. He clearly made it his business to read widely in the field. Some of his tales refer explicitly to its established tropes and clichés before building on them or subverting them (not, despite the view of some critics, that art need subvert its chosen form). While the Victorian spectre was often æthereal or simply kept its distance, James's apparitions tend to be grisly and physical, though a glimpse of them is frequently enough to provoke a shudder. The sheet had pretty well become the uniform of the traditional ghost, and so (in "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad") James imagines its ultimate manifestation: a sly black joke, perhaps, but memorably horrible.

Many of his stories were written for reading aloud. Some were composed to frighten children: the first audience of "A School Story" was the King's College Choir School, while "Wailing Well" was heard at a camp fire by the Eton College Boy Scout troop. Most, however, were initially performed to adult friends at King's as an annual Christmas treat. In this, James clearly meant to align himself with the tradition of the festive ghost story and indeed of oral storytelling, and he remarks in the introduction to his collected stories that he has "tried to make my ghosts act in ways not inconsistent with the rules of folklore". All this may suggest a certain cosiness, which would be confirmed by the standard view that the most important Jamesian attribute is his antiquarianism. Of course, that is crucial to the verisimilitude of many of the stories, and many of them deal with scholars whose comfortable world is invaded by the malign supernatural. Nevertheless, I maintain that

the essence of James is to be found less in his characters and settings than in his technique. The quality that makes his best tales – which is to say most of them – unforgettable is his wit in communicating horror.

I hope it is not presumptuous of me to suggest he would have taken this as praise. In his *Bookman* essay, he calls for "malevolence and terror... and a modicum of blood" and two years later, in the *Evening News*, wrote "I say you must have horror and also malevolence. Not less necessary, however, is reticence." He had no time for fiction that sought to be nauseating, but story after story demonstrates his willingness to be as frightening as possible. Nor was his definition of the ghostly confined to revenants. His tales swarm with spiders either giant or multitudinous, immense, half-glimpsed insects, tentacled demons and even worse familiars to be found down wells or, most nightmarish of all, under your pillow. Even the returned dead tend to be, in his own words, ugly and thin. He had a genius for the telling phrase, into which he could compress more supernatural dread than most of us can manage in a paragraph. It's hardly surprising that on Peter Nicholls's tribute to the ghost story on Radio 4's *Kaleidoscope*, Kingsley Amis (author of *The Green Man*, one of the very few successful Jamesian novels) was able to quote verbatim from memory a gruesome passage from the provost's "Count Magnus".

James might have been surprised by other occurrences of his own influence: in the tales of HP Lovecraft (**FT184:32–40**) (the admiration was not mutual), in LP Hartley, in some of the detective novels of John Dickson Carr and his alter ego Carter Dickson (see **FT288:55; 291:68**), in a ghostly tale embedded in Penelope Fitzgerald's splendid novel *The Gate of Angels*.

Opinions remain divided over various attempts to film James; certainly Jacques Tourneur, director of three supremely reticent RKO horror films of the 1940s, was the man to do it, and *Night of the Demon*, loosely based on "Casting the Runes", is one of the most accomplished examples of British horror cinema. The most authentic tribute on celluloid so far may well be the 1997 Japanese film *Ringu*, a modern retelling of more than one Jamesian episode.

STEPHEN JONES, EDITOR OF *CURIOUS WARNINGS: THE GREAT GHOST STORIES OF M R JAMES*



M R James invented the modern ghost story as we know it. He replaced the Gothic horrors of the previous century with more contemporary settings for his subtle hauntings, which were read aloud to

selected gatherings of friends at Christmas. He remains the most influential writer of supernatural fiction in the English language, and although his tales have been much imitated, they have never been surpassed. Despite many of his best-known stories being written around a century ago, his work continues to inspire new authors and filmmakers, and it is just as relevant – and just as powerful – today as it was when it was first published.

KIM NEWMAN, AUTHOR OF THE *ANNO DRACULA* SERIES AND *PROFESSOR MORIARTY: THE HOUND OF THE D'URBERVILLES*



I've always found it odd that some critics use M R James's subtleties as a club to bash the more explicit horror writers who came after him, since few writers of supernatural fiction are so good on the physical, horrible details of the supernatural: his ghosts are hairy, wet-lipped, capriciously violent, smelly, all too tangibly there even when they're unseen; and James had a knack for gruesome stuff, like the face sucked off the skull in "Count Magnus" or the ripped-out organs of "Lost Hearts". Yes, there's a lot of scholarship, a real skill at embedding hauntings in credible history, and a set of premises that have almost passed from the page and become modern folktales (the creeping thing in the painting, the frightful fiends summoned by runes or whistles, the disappearing hotel room, the shambler behind the library stacks). I still have the slim Penguin *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* from my parents' library – one of the first books of horror I found to hand when the bug bit in my early teens.

JOHN CONNOLLY, AUTHOR OF THE *CHARLIE PARKER* SERIES OF CRIME THRILLERS



I've often thought that supernatural fiction and crime fiction are much closer cousins than some might like to admit. To some degree, they both deal with intrusion. In a crime novel, the intrusion is human in origin – it's a murderer, or a thief, or a blackmailer – whereas in supernatural fiction, the intruder is non-human, but the outcome is the same: the victim's view of the world is irredeemably shaken, and there can never again be the same confidence in the tenets of existence.

For me, James is the master of supernatural intrusion, but he provides an added complication, to borrow the term that clockmakers use to describe the additional details on a timepiece: the initial act of

intrusion is often committed by a person, and this in turn rouses the sleeping horror. For that reason, “A Warning to the Curious” always seems to me to encapsulate James’s philosophy in a nutshell, and it’s a peculiar philosophy to encounter from an academic. In effect, James’s stories form a consistent chorus arguing against intellectual curiosity. There is a fear of the world there, but it seems to me to combine within it both a hatred for the modern and a dread of older evils. I suppose that, in this sense, James was a big influence on my work: while they’re set in the modern world, and confront questions of human wrongdoing, there is a deeper, older evil that runs through them too. I don’t think I would be writing the kind of books that I write had I not, at an early age, encountered the stories of M R James, and been profoundly influenced by them. He is the master: quite simply, nobody has ever created a finer body of short supernatural fiction.

STEPHEN VOLK, WRITER OF TV’s *GHOSTWATCH* AND *AFTERLIFE*



As somebody once said, the electric light switch dispelled the dark but sometimes it is nice to go back, before the light switch. To return to MRJ is to return to a less ambiguous age, where ghosts were uniformly nasty

and conformed to folkloric rules of cause-and-effect: musty engines of ancient malevolence in tales unfettered by modern technology and scepticism. What I learned from the Master is that the ghost is indistinguishable from the character seeing the ghost, and atmosphere is indistinguishable from story.

GARY MCMAHON, AUTHOR OF *PRETTY LITTLE DEAD THINGS* AND *CONCRETE GROVE*



Montague Rhodes James was possibly the greatest ever exponent of the traditional English ghost story. Yet there is so much more to these stories than the desire of an author to scare his readers. The use of language

is exceptional – a seemingly banal phrase or image terrifies us in a way that can now be recognised as uniquely “Jamesian”. There’s a gradual accretion of atmosphere, which gives each story a cumulative effect, and his ghosts are often unforgettable in their utter weirdness.

ADAM NEVILL, AUTHOR OF *THE RITUAL* AND *LAST DAYS*



Few have depicted the supernatural as so ghostly, yet entertaining, or described its manifestations with such skilful brevity to make the uncanny so vivid. James was a master of psychological apprehension and

physical horror, who consistently achieved a sublime state of terror in fiction specifically written to bring dread to the reader. Whenever I write, I imagine him standing behind my chair. If he shakes his head, I start over.

master of English prose. If he waxes a little orotund at times, he is, you sense, never less than in control. And he’s a brilliant literary pasticheur – another talent that shone through at an early age. He could be scathing about the writing of others, especially when those others came from America and wrote on matters supernatural. His response to a very generous appreciation of his fiction written by “one HP Lovecraft” is withering: “His style,” wrote James “is of the most offensive. He uses the word cosmic about 24 times.”¹ And an American series of pulp horror books called *Not at Night* was dismissed as “merely nauseating”.² Cranky ideas from across the Atlantic were similarly damned. A book of badly forged apocryphal texts called *The Archko Volume* edited by Rev. WD Mahan, of Boonville, Missouri, was lengthily ridiculed by James in a church newspaper in 1900 before being summed up as “the most intolerable, ignorant, stupid, tumid bosh”.³

I can’t help feeling that had he ever come across a copy of *The Book of the Damned* or its successors, James might well have shared HG Wells’s opinion of Fort as “one of the most damnable bores who ever cut scraps from out-of-the-way newspapers... And he writes like a drunkard.”⁴

No, Fort and James were not natural bed-fellows. And yet... “Scraps from out-of-the-way newspapers”, or their scholarly equivalents, were in a way the stuff of which James’s writings – both fictional and academic – were made.

“*Damned data*” lie at the heart of many of his ghost stories. The Jamesian narrator is a man who spends large amounts of time in libraries and archives, and his tale is often set in motion by the discovery or chance reading of a document. Snippets of writing or lore that might be casually dismissed as superstitious, legendary or naïve are shown to hold elements of unsettling truth, to offer glimpses into an unsuspected, irrational world.

“The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral”, first published in 1910,⁵ offers a classic example of the apparently innocuous press clipping that hides a terrifying truth. “This matter began, as far as I am concerned, with the reading of a notice in the obituary section of *The Gentleman’s Magazine* for an early year in the 19th century...” begins the narrator, and he goes on to describe how the subject of the obituary, the Archdeacon Robert Benwell Haynes, an apparently model cleric, met with “a tragedy as appalling as it was unexpected...”

The narrator, a professional cataloguer,

pieces together the true story from a diverse selection of written sources – the article in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, Haynes’s own diaries, a blackmailing letter, an old hand-scrawled poem from the archive of a provincial museum. Individually, these documents are meaningless curiosities. Taken together, they offer evidence of a horrifying supernatural event.

WHAT IF?

So much of James’s fiction is predicated on the unspoken question “What if?” What if the superstitions and legends that so interested him did, in fact, contain elements of the truth? What if it really was unlucky to blow a whistle by the sea? What if the Faustian pact were a possibility? What if one really could tell the future from a randomly chosen verse of Scripture?

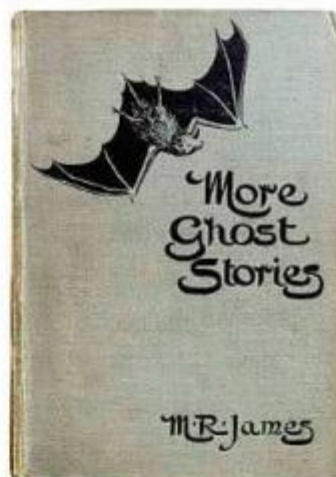
This last question is posited in “The Ash Tree”,⁶ which describes the initiation and aftermath of a witch trial in Suffolk in 1690. It opens with a statement of fortean open-mindedness, a gentle challenge to the orthodox, common sense belief that the witch-hunting mania of the 17th century was based on hysteria, bullying and lies. And it’s worth quoting this section in full, because it’s a good example of the scholarly, curious

narrative voice that is heard again and again in James’s tales:

“It will be long, I think, before we arrive at a just estimate of the amount of solid reason – if there was any – which lay at the root of the universal fear of witches in old times. Whether the persons accused of this offence really did imagine that they were possessed of unusual powers of any kind; or whether they had the will at least, if not the power, of doing mischief to their neighbours; or whether all the confessions, of which there are so many, were extorted by the mere cruelty of the witchfinders – these are questions which are not, I fancy, yet solved. And the present narrative gives me pause. I cannot altogether sweep it away as mere invention. The reader must judge for himself.”

That last sentence is a formula that could fit into any one of James’s tales, and it recalls Fort himself in *The Book of the Damned*: “Here are the data. Make what you will, yourself, of them...” It’s almost as if the Jamesian narrator is inviting his reader to make a fool of himself by being too ready to either believe or dismiss the tale he has to tell.

“The Ash Tree” really is a terrific story: funny when it wants to be, very



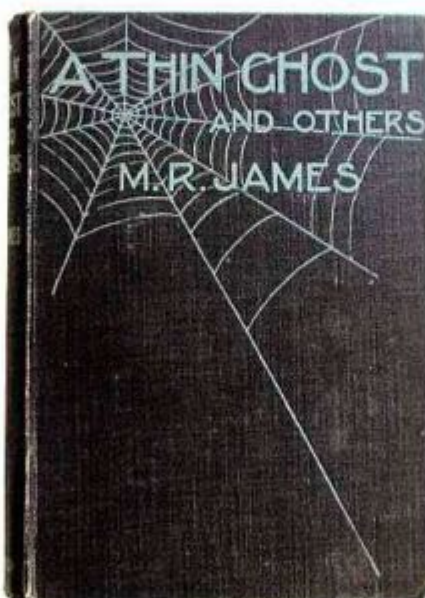


ABOVE: James agreed to publish his earliest ghost stories as a collection in 1904 on the condition that his great friend James McBryde be employed to illustrate them. McBryde died suddenly in June that year, before he'd finished this, his first professional commission. This illustration, showing the climax to "Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad", is one of only four that he completed, and is a superb complement to James's unforgettable tale of solitude and night terror.

grisly even by James's standards, and ultimately rather mysterious. I won't damage it further by trying to summarise the plot. I simply urge you to read it for yourselves, not least for the appearance of the giant... no, I'll say no more. Just enjoy it. That's what it was written for.

It's always worth remembering that James's ghost stories were above all else created for entertainment. Many were composed to be read aloud to a select group of friends at King's College, Cambridge, on Christmas Eves before World War I. They were party pieces, not vehicles for any coherent or serious theory of the supernatural. Nor indeed, I think, do they betray any strong belief in the paranormal. James certainly allowed for the existence of ghosts⁷ and he summed up his position clearly towards the end of his life: "*I am prepared to consider the evidence and accept it if it satisfies me*"⁸ (which again sounds rather fortean). But on the few occasions that he reflected on the subject in his writings, you sense a weariness with what he called "*the veridical ghost story*",⁹ and the work of the Society for Psychical Research (founded in 1882, the year that James went up to Cambridge). In "*The Mezzotint*",¹⁰ he pokes gentle fun at the Phasmatological Society – the name

THEY WERE NOT VEHICLES FOR A THEORY OF THE SUPERNATURAL



of a real group of Oxford undergraduate ghost-hunters who pre-dated and were eventually absorbed by the Cambridge-dominated SPR.¹¹

EXCLUDED BOOKS

But there's another body of work by James that deserves the attention of forteans, one that he himself took much more seriously than his ghost stories. His published work on the Apocryphal Books of the New Testament isn't widely looked at today, I suspect, and indeed it doesn't make for particularly easy reading. But as a scholar James did more than anyone else of his generation to bring this curious material to wider attention.

He was, for most of his life, fascinated by those early Christian texts that were not included in the Canon of the New Testament. "*I had cherished for years, I still cherish, a quite peculiar interest in any document that has claimed to be a Book of the Bible, and is not,*" he recalled in his memoirs, "*Nowadays I suppose it would be proper to say that I have a complex about it.*"¹² In the 1890s, at around the same time that he first started writing ghost stories, he began publishing commentaries on these books. And this work culminated in 1924 with *The Apocryphal New Testament*, the most



ABOVE LEFT: James was a keen traveller and several of his stories were based on expeditions that he made abroad. Here he is seen, at right, with his friends Will Stone (centre) and James McBryde (left) during one of their trips to Denmark in 1899 or 1900. These trips gave rise to James's story "Number 13" and a curious 'graphic novel' by McBryde called "The Story of a Troll Hunt", in which are described the adventures of three Cambridge men and their search for Trolls to take back to the Fitzwilliam Museum. **ABOVE RIGHT:** This was, perhaps appropriately, No.13 in a series of portraits of University worthies published in a short-lived Cambridge periodical called *The Gownsmen*. It was printed along with an appreciation of James, who was at the time Provost of King's College, on 17 Feb 1910 – just two months before the publication of "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral".

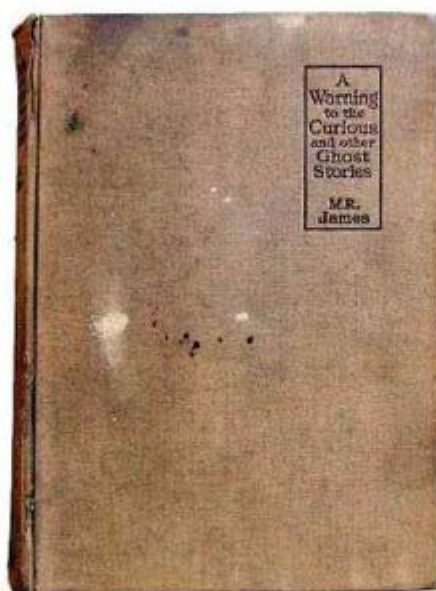
authoritative and complete translation of them up to that time.

If Fort's *Book of the Damned* offered "a procession of data that Science has excluded," then, in a sense, this book offered a procession of the data that Christianity has excluded.

In the Preface, James defines his terms. The words apocrypha and apocryphal, he explained, "began by being terms of dignity and respect... An apocryphal book was – originally – one too sacred and secret to be in everyone's hands: it must be reserved for the initiate, the inner circle of believers. But in order to enlist respect, such books were almost always issued under venerable names which they had no true right to bear. We hear of apocryphal books of Adam, Moses and so forth. The pretence was that these had lately been brought to light, after ages of concealment by pious disciples. I do not intend to write a history of the gradual degradation of the words: I need only say that the falsity of the attributions was soon recognized: and so... in the parlance of Jerome, who has influenced posterity more than anyone else in this matter, apocryphal means spurious, false, to be rejected and, probably, disliked."

These non-Canonical texts, particularly the Acts of the various Apostles, contain strong elements of romance and folklore,

and there's a proliferation of what one might broadly call 'fortean phenomena'. Fish walk on dry land. A statue vomits forth water. A man has a wasps' nest up his nose. And talking animals crop up again and again: in the Acts of Thomas, a "she-ass's colt" delivers a speech to a crowd of Indians; in the Acts of Philip a leopard describes his own conversion to Christianity; and in an account of the life of St Peter,



the Apostle enlists the help of a talking dog in his combat with the sorcerer and unholy thaumaturge Simon Magus (whom we'll meet again later).

Now, James makes it quite clear that he does not believe the Apocrypha are true or theologically useful accounts of the early days of the Church. And he certainly isn't banging a drum for their inclusion in the Bible. "It will be very quickly seen", he writes in the Preface, "that there is no question of anyone's having excluded them from the New Testament: they have done that for themselves."

As with the evidence presented in "The Ash Tree", James offers the texts "in order to enable others to form a judgment on them", but he asserts also their "great and enduring interest," as records of "the imaginations, hopes, and fears of the men who wrote them." And rather than simply collect and publish it, James put this neglected data to positive use, in the interpretation of art.

AT THE LITERARY MARGINS

There's one apocryphal tale which found its way obliquely into both his scholarship and his ghost stories. In 1899, James published an article in an antiquarian journal about a set of lost wall paintings from the choir of the 12th-century cathedral in

BEING M R JAMES

ROBERT LLOYD PARRY reflects on how he came to take on the role of England's greatest writer of ghost stories in a series of live readings.

"St Bertrand de Comminges is a decayed town on the spurs of the Pyrenees, not very far from Toulouse, and still nearer to Bagnères-de-Luchon..."

These are the first words of M R James that most people read. I first read them in the 1980s, when I was about 13, in an old Penguin edition lent to me by my dad. And though they may not exactly grab you by the scruff of the neck straight off, the deceptively gentle, increasingly odd narrative that follows them certainly does. Or it did me, at any rate. It still hasn't let go.

The words come from "Canon Alberic's Scrap-book", the first really scary, grown-up ghost story that we know James wrote. He read it aloud to friends in his rooms in King's College, Cambridge, on 28 October 1893. It's a brilliantly paced tale of antiquarianism and demonic haunting, and it set the standard for the 30 or so stories that followed.

Twenty-three years after first reading the story, I travelled to St Bertrand on a kind of literary pilgrimage. It's no longer a decayed town. In fact it's rather smart, with a couple of nice restaurants and bars, and a delightful old world hotel with bedrooms overlooking the small square in front of the cathedral. This



JAMES'S WORDS AND TALES STILL HAVE THE POWER TO TRANSFIX

cathedral is itself a thing of great beauty and strangeness, just as James's tale promises. There's a stuffed crocodile hanging on the wall, a desiccated, sickly looking thing, like a 5ft (1.5m)-long scab. And there's a remarkable set of carvings in the choir stalls, which bristle with sybils, saints, prophets and one or two hairy demons. At night, the bats roosting in the

tower make it wheeze like an asthmatic lung.

I spent three days in St Bertrand, wandering the lanes and the surrounding foothills, as I tried to learn James's sometimes rather convoluted sentences off by heart. I had a conviction, very early, that his stories needed to be performed out loud – this was even before I knew that most of them were originally written with that in mind. And I was now committing his first one to memory because I had been offered the perfect venue in which to put this conviction to the test.

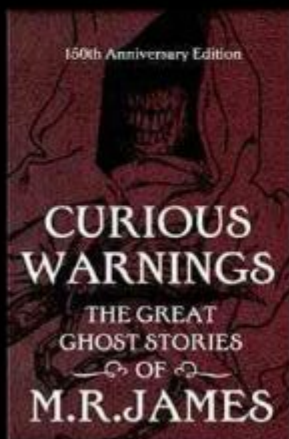
The Founder's Library of the Fitzwilliam Museum – of which James was the Director from

1883 until 1908 and where I was employed in a more modest capacity at the time – is a splendid late-Victorian interior. The smells of leather binding and vellum still linger, and it was here that James had started his life's work of cataloguing all the mediaeval manuscripts in the Cambridge collections. It was here, too, I'm sure, surrounded by ancient books and shadows, seated in a pool of candlelight and pipe smoke, that James conceived and wrote his first great ghost story.

I paired the story with another early one, "The Mezzotint", and premiered them there in December 2005. It went well enough for me to take it elsewhere. And I'm very surprised, but even more pleased, that nearly seven years, a dozen large tubs of Brylcreem and five bottles of "Woods of Windsor For Men Aftershave" later, I'm still dressing up in a dark suit and little horn-rimmed glasses and performing James's stories to anyone who'll listen. I now have eight of them in the repertoire. And learning them doesn't get any easier.

I must get bored, people tell me. And I do, sometimes. But more often I'm astonished that these stories still work as monologues and as supernatural thrillers – that they still provoke the right kind of laughter, deliver the appropriate amount of fear. It's true there are those who can't resist snoozing through them, those who remain unmoved by James's spooks. But for most people, 150 years after he was born, 78 years after he died, James's words and tales still have the power to transfix.

COMPETITION



This gorgeous hardback collection contains all 35 of M R James's highly acclaimed ghost stories, including the classics 'Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad' and 'Canon Alberic's Scrapbook'. As well as a foreword by Clark Ashton Smith and an extended afterword by editor Stephen Jones, the book is gloriously illustrated by award-winning artist Les Edwards, who has provided a frontispiece and a dozen full-page illustrations, as well as many small pictures throughout the text. Thanks to Quercus Books, we have three copies of **CURIOUS WARNINGS** to give away.

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Peterborough.¹³ The paintings had been all but destroyed by Cromwell's soldiers in 1643, and nothing of them survived by the 19th century. But through a typically clever and thorough bit of scholarship, by comparing and collating various sources, James worked out their likely subject matter and arrangement within the church. It's all very convincing, if really rather dry. But at the end of the paper James cannot resist a final observation that has nothing to do with the paintings he has been discussing:

"Before I leave Peterborough I should like to add one note on a piece of iconography connected with the great West Front. It may perhaps be remembered that the base of the central shaft of the door by which one enters the Church is sculptured with a scene of two demons who have between them a man with wildly disordered hair falling head downwards."

It's a dramatic scene that is still well preserved today. The cathedral guidebook in James's day suggested that this was generic, "a Benedictine monk tortured by devils... put there as a warning to the other monks." But as James rightly points out, "there is nothing to show that the person is a Benedictine monk, either in respect of dress, tonsure, or general appearance."

Instead he offers another, far more entertaining explanation, and indulges in a little storytelling from the Apocrypha: "Remember that the sculpture is the central lowest point of the façade and carry your eye to the central topmost point. There, enthroned in the middle gable, you will see St Peter. And having realised that, I think you will not doubt that the person who is below his feet is his great rival, Simon Magus. For it may or may not be known to you that Simon Magus, after having suffered many galling reverses at the hands of St Peter, finally announced that whatever the result of previous experiments might have been, he was going to make a success of the final one, and that on a certain day he would fly up to Heaven from the Campus Martius. Fly he did for some little



distance: and then St Peter, who was praying below, rose and ordered the demons who were holding Simon to let him fall. They did not hesitate to do so, and Simon broke both his legs. It is then, the disgrace of Simon Magus, who is shown at the moment when the devils left hold of him, that is represented on the base of the central shaft of Peterborough West Front."

This story is told in several of the apocryphal texts that James went on to translate in 1924 and the flight of Simon Magus is alluded to in his early ghost story "Lost Hearts",¹⁴ where it is cited admiringly by the black magician Mr Abney – doomed himself, like Simon, to a violent humiliation.

Now, this is all a long way from falling frogs and Super-Sargasso Seas. But it reminds us that both James and Fort found their vocations (and their celebrity) poking around at the literary margins, excavating the forgotten, the neglected and the ignored. Fort spoke with some pride of the

LEFT: The demonic sculpture in Peterborough Cathedral that attracted James's attention – and for which he suggested an explanation.

'bizarre hospitalities'¹⁵ to which he was given. And abstruseness was almost an end in itself for James. Later in life he recalled, also with some pride, a childhood spent learning "names of obscure authors, all of whom it was my ambition – for no definite reason – to read. At this time, in fact, all antique knowledge seemed immensely desirable ... Nothing could be more inspiring than to discover that St Livinus had his tongue cut out and was beheaded, or that David's mother was called Nitzeneth."¹⁶ This passion for the less travelled byways of antiquity and Christian legend spurred him on throughout his life.

In 1925, M R James was appointed as a Trustee of The British Museum. "It is indeed a satisfaction to me to be enrolled," he wrote to his friend Eric Millar who'd helped secure the appointment. "Whether, when I go through the Department of Manuscripts with a toothcomb in one hand and an axe in the other, you will continue to feel that all is for the best, who knows?"¹⁷

At the same time, Charles Fort regularly turned up with his own toothcomb to the Reading Room of the British Library, housed at the time in the Museum. Did the two men ever meet? Bump into each other, perhaps, in a darkened stack? Exchange a nodded acknowledgment as they occupied adjacent urinals? And if they did, would they have talked? Shared their obscure interests? Speculated together?

Probably not. But, like them, we are, if nothing else, entitled to ask "what if?" **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

ROBERT LLOYD PARRY is an actor, and writer and Grand Panjandrum of Nunkie Theatre Company.



Since 2005, he has been touring a trilogy of one-man shows based on the ghost stories of M R James around the UK, USA and Ireland. For details of live performances and DVDs, visit www.nunkie.co.uk.

NOTES

1 <http://bit.ly/N8sqmW> (users. globalnet.co.uk). Lovecraft's appreciation of James can be found in "Supernatural Horror in Literature", *The Recluse*, 1927; <http://bit.ly/N2cjYE> (gaslight.mtroyal.ab.ca).

2 M R James: "Some Remarks on Ghost Stories", *The Bookman*, Dec 1929.

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4 Quoted in Jim Steinmeyer: *Charles Fort: The Man who invented the Supernatural*, William Heinemann, 2008, p255.

5 *Contemporary Review* XCVII, no.35 (April 1910), 449–460, under the title "The Stalls of Barchester: Materials for a Ghost Story".

6 First published in *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, 1904.

7 There is reason to believe that he had a vivid supernatural experience

as a child, related in his last ghost story, "A Vignette", published in *The London Mercury* 35, 1936, a few weeks after his death.

8 Preface to *Collected Ghost Stories*, 1931.

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11 Harry Price: *Fifty Years of Psychological Research*, 1939, p48.

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FBI FORTEAN BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

120. Friends aren't electric

People all over the world report ill effects from exposure to electromagnetic frequencies, but many medical experts dispute that the symptoms these sufferers report are anything but psychological in origin. **GEORGE BINNING** surveys the fraught field of Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity.

Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity (EHS) is a controversial condition. Many claim that the wide range of sometimes debilitating symptoms associated with EHS is caused by exposure to electromagnetic frequencies (EMF); many others claim the condition is psychosomatic.

The correlation between symptoms and the presence of EMF is very much observable in the real world: these waves are all around us, almost all the time. The symptoms are triggered by anything with an AC current (which the mains supply is, worldwide): phones, fridges, toasters, and so on. But controlled experiments to define the causal role of EMF have produced conflicting, generally negative, results; accusations of vested interests, wonky methodology and biased analysis fly thick and fast. As a result, passions flare in the laboratory, neither side accepting the evidence of the other.

Those who favour the EMF causality theory are frustrated that their cause is not more widely accepted and take pains to maintain their image; one such scientist whom I approached insisted on retaining anonymity, saying: "If I am linked with anything paranormal, it's going to reduce my credibility in scientific circles. It's a delicate area of science right now, and needs to be handled with care."

A recent study aims to clear the air, successfully demonstrating the inflammatory effect of EMF on a hypersensitive patient, using the all-important double-blind test. But does it?

The paper appeared in the September 2011 edition of the peer-reviewed *International Journal of Neuroscience* under the title "Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity: Evidence for a Novel Neurological Syndrome" (McCarty et

al.) and has been met with cautious interest by the scientific community.

A simple provocation experiment was conducted on a female physician self-diagnosed with EHS in order to ascertain her sensitivity to EMF. She was exposed to a random series of 10 pulsed frequencies and 10 sham intervals for 100 seconds each; between these, the subject indicated her awareness of a field and described the nature of her symptoms. The experiment was then repeated using five pulsed, five constant, and five sham transmissions. Both interviewer and subject were blinded to the actual presence of EMF.

The authors' analysis of the data shows that the subject was able to consistently identify the presence of EMF with a *p-value* <0.05: i.e. the probability of observing this result under the null hypothesis (a result obtained by chance) being less than five per cent. This five per cent threshold is an arbitrary value widely used by statisticians, below which a statistical significance can be determined and the null hypothesis rejected. So far, so good.

Dr Olle Johansson, a leading researcher into EMF's biological effects at the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, welcomed the result but pointed out that as a single case study it was just "one of several pieces in the jigsaw".

David Coggon, OBE, chair of the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Project Management Council (MTHR PMC) and professor of Occupational and Environmental Medicine at the Medical Research Council's Lifecourse Epidemiology Unit (MRC), warned against the reproducibility of the outcome. He told me: "The McCarty study seems to have been well conducted, and without major flaws. However, despite the

statistical significance of the findings, I would be wary about drawing strong conclusions. Experience has shown that positive findings in single studies often cannot be replicated."

The academic insistence on replicable results has proved problematic for studies of EHS due to the unpredictable variation of symptoms and sensitivity associated with the condition. Our unnamed scientist defended these potentially unreliable experiments. "In the event that an experiment fails to show reproducibility of the data, that doesn't show the data was incorrect. It might just be that the testing methods are not showing what we need to show adequately."

Having seen the new study, Dr James Rubin, professor of psychological medicine at Kings College, London, admitted the results were "interesting". He praised the execution of the experiment, but had some observations of his own concerning the analysis of the results.

"They've asked their participant to tell them whether the field is on or off, and the participant reports when she can sense it or not, then she sometimes qualifies that by describing her symptoms. But when they analyse those results they clump those descriptions together a bit and analyse them as 'none', 'mild', or 'more than mild'.

"Actually I had a look, and if you re-do their statistics, and just do it on whether the participant says they got a symptom, or didn't get a symptom, I don't think the result is quite as strong as the authors make out."

In January, the *International Journal of Neuroscience* published a letter from Rubin and associates detailing their complaint and sparking a chain of increasingly embittered correspondence. They criticised the lack of consistent symptom rating and apparent multiple grading of symptoms, and suggested the results had been subject to *post hoc* analysis. Using Fisher's exact test (a significance test based on yes/no data rather than graded data) they showed the result carried a *p-value* of 0.07; finally the letter warned: "[S]tudies in which participants do not respond to stimuli that are conventionally thought to be harmless are difficult to publish, leading to publication bias."

The response from Marino, Carrubba and McCarty explains that the subject-defined categories of symptoms were part of a "patient-centred" approach, and that their experiment "was designed to detect whether EHS was a linear or a nonlinear phenomenon". They also argue that "a 93 per cent chance of a real correlation between EMFs and disease (assuming *p*=0.07) and a 97 per cent chance (assuming *p*=0.03) have materially identical implications." Finally, the scientists take a swipe at the MTHR,



insinuating that being “funded by sources for whom general acceptance of an association between environmental EMFs and human disease would be financially disadvantageous... creates at least the appearance of an important financial conflict of interest”.

This final point incited a fierce published rebuttal from Rubin, which reiterated his unanswered concerns of *post-hoc* analysis. Then in April, David Coggon wrote in to defend the MTHR’s independence and, with reference to the p-value, explain that the low probability of a chance result under the null hypothesis suddenly being used to signify a high probability of the alternative hypothesis being true is “incorrect”.

Dr Rubin has conducted two previous, influential reviews of the research into EHS, funded in part by MTHR and the NHS Foundation Trust. Having selected 46 of the most robust studies, involving a total of 1,175 volunteer EHS sufferers, Rubin and his team uncovered seven papers that supported the biological effect of blind exposure to EMF. However, of those seven, Rubin identified three with shortcomings in their statistical methods, two experiments which could not subsequently be replicated by the same research teams and two which produced contradictory results. In one case, EHS volunteers were allegedly caught cheating by un-blinding the test.

Dr Rubin explained his interpretation of EHS: “I suspect there may actually be a psychological mechanism which is triggering their symptoms – this thing called the nocebo effect, the reverse of the placebo effect. What you see in these experiments is that when the participants are convinced they are being exposed to an electromagnetic field they start to develop their symptoms, and that happens regardless of whether they are or aren’t actually being exposed to the EMF. So it’s something to do with the belief they are being exposed to a nasty toxic substance which is causing their symptoms rather than the actual exposure itself. And that I think is a much more interesting story than just electromagnetic waves causing symptoms, because if it’s your own belief that’s causing symptoms, it’s fascinating.”



ABOVE: A recent protest in Brussels against environmental pollution, from chemical toxins and smoking to bee stings and electrical equipment.

EHS remains something of a laboratory spook...

A sea of research has tossed a raft of problems into the face of EMF-EHS scientists trying to support their claims of causality. Without an official seal, the condition must be self-diagnosed, and there is no broadly consistent pattern of symptoms, making replication of results problematic. Electro-sensitive volunteers have also shown a general tendency to report more symptoms than the control group. Individual case studies are open to chance results, and tests on larger groups are thought to produce more accurate averages, but both can be prejudiced in any or all of these ways.

The sum of these real observations

and null findings has a powerful influence on the way all studies into EHS are perceived. The psychosomatic explanation might seem a logical choice, but the committed sceptic must accept that the factors mentioned above are bound to skew both group surveys and individual studies. Therefore, any genuinely unusual evidence will be lost beneath the large numbers of people who are susceptible to nocebo effects, non-linear symptoms and the like. A population survey in Sweden revealed far higher instances of other intolerances and impairments in EHS sufferers than the controls, leading to a prevalence of misdiagnosis by confused patients. But even this would obscure any ‘genuine’ data, and might equally signify a heightened sensitivity to many environmental factors, EMF being one overlapping cause of symptoms. For all that has been discovered, EHS remains something of a laboratory spook.

Living with EHS

While the debate rages on, the victims of EHS unanimously agree that their condition is brought on by EMF; the psychosomatic explanation is not well received and the implication that their symptoms are ‘all in the mind’ seems ridiculous. Ruth Davis has excruciating firsthand experience. She describes

herself as an “EHS refugee”, living in a motor home, blown from place to place by the harsh winds of the Californian desert. Her dreadful list of symptoms, she says, include: “Exhaustion, heart palpitations, elevated blood pressure, migraine headaches, arthritis attacks, fibromyalgia, blurred vision, sleep deprivation cycles lasting six months, adrenal collapse, panic attacks, deep depression onsets, hand and leg pain so sharp I can’t hold a steering wheel or press the accelerator peddle, severe back pain, deep meridian inflammation, toothaches, ringing in the ears and stabbing pains all immediately following traceable and known radiation source exposures.”

In Ruth’s case, panic, depression and insomnia are self-reported psychological symptoms, but she describes a situation where administering psychological medication and discounting EMF causality can have sinister implications.

“Our Social Security Administration – where I’m trying to get disability recognition and support – has treated me with complete disregard and degradation. I think they may be

afraid of the avalanche that will result if they acknowledge that this is real. One doctor recommended I be put on anti-depressants. Putting an electro-sensitive on drugs to mask their reactions, and sending them back into the environment which is making them sick is tantamount to signing their death warrant."

In Sweden, where the incidence of EHS is very high, it is not recognised as a disease as such, hence no diagnosis exists; instead it is classed as a functional impairment. The government takes the line that the specific cause is not known, preferring to focus on the severity of symptoms and the level of entitlement to disability benefit and pension. Knowing how to treat the electro-sensitive is perhaps the route into treating EHS as a condition. Dr Johansson argues that: "The electrically hypersensitive must, in every situation and by all available means, demand respect, representation and power." Many of the electro-sensitive point to the example set by the Swedish model, but the British establishment isn't on quite the same wavelength. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) incorporates the Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR) and the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). At the same time, research into EHS is mostly outsourced to the MTHR, from whom Dr Rubin receives his funding, and the cost is shared between the government and telecoms industry.

After a quick round of enquiries, I learned that nobody at the MRC-HPA Centre for Environment & Health specialised in the field of EHS; Dr Caroline Lucas is Green MP and trustee of the UK Radiation Research Trust, but I was told by her press secretary this was "not an issue which Caroline is working on at present"; and an HPA spokesperson stated: "Some people claim to be sensitive to electromagnetic fields, so-called electrical sensitivity. They suffer from a range of symptoms that can intrude on their daily lives. However, at present there is little scientific evidence demonstrating that it is the EMF exposure that causes the symptoms. Nevertheless



effective treatments need to be found for the causes of these symptoms."

Brian Stein is the director of electromagneticman.co.uk, a leading EHS forum here in Britain. In his struggle to have EHS officially recognised as a *bona fide* environmental intolerance, he has held meetings with Patricia Hewitt (then Health Minister, now non-executive director at BT), Ken Clarke (Justice Secretary), and Sir William Stewart (Chairman of the HPA), all of which have led to frustrating dead ends.

After 14 years of phone use, Stein developed symptoms which deteriorated into a full functional impairment. In order to participate in society, he makes a compromise by minimising his exposure. He sleeps in a shielded room, turning off the electricity at night, and driving a 20-year-old Bentley; his area of access is becoming increasingly limited, with wifi spreading to trains, hotels, high streets and friends' houses.

All parties agree that not enough is done to treat EHS properly, but what 'properly' means is another matter. Complete removal from the EMF-filthy environment is an approach favoured by some, such as Ruth. She and Gary Duncan, founder of Smart Shelter Network, have applied features of the Chinese Meridian System to their system of treatment, reasoning that EMF affects their bodily metabolism through their acupuncture 'pressure points'. Techniques involve self-applied meridian massage and full-body grounding, "referred to as 'Spooning'", Duncan explains, "because they use a

ABOVE: Some claim that protective nets or veils, such as these in use in France, can alleviate the effects of electrical fields.

large stainless steel ladle attached to electrical ground to dissipate excess body field accumulation". Both lying on wet grass and barefoot contact with the earth are reported to have similar effects.

As well as the holistic approach, industry has responded to the demands of EHS patients worldwide; Dr Johansson described the successful application in Sweden of EMF-shielding carbon-based paint. EMF-proof nets, curtains and clothes are now available, along with sensors, and degaussers (which work by emitting massive AC fields themselves).

Dr Rubin took a dim view of EMF shielding products, saying, "There are other ways of delivering a placebo that don't involve people spending an absolute fortune on devices of unproven accuracy." His 2006 review of EHS treatment compares studies into the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), acupuncture, the Synchronon® Scalar Synchronizer (a 'shielding' EMF emitter), computer screen shields and antioxidant vitamin supplements. He concludes that CBT is the "most appropriate" treatment, though calls for more research.

The aches and pains associated with EHS are certainly very real, but disagreement over their cause is hampering treatment. Rather than try to define the specific cause, CBT tries to highlight how circular patterns of thought can lead to depressed well-being; while alternative remedies work for some people and not others, Rubin also notes that CBT's psychological aspect can be resisted by patients who are convinced of the effect of EMF. If the 'most appropriate' treatment is not always the most effective, it is hard to know what to do. A better handling of EHS is needed, but to build a model of treatment on any false assumptions is surely storing up problems for the future. **FT**



GEORGE BINNING is a freelance journalist and avid forteran, interested in sacred geometry and cerealogy. He produces idiotic zines and is a prefect at the Idler Academy. georgebinning.wordpress.com

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SEEING HOOP SNAKES

JEROME CLARK expresses his affection for the hoop snake - a reptile that can't possibly exist but that people have been seeing all over America for centuries...

Herpetologist Percy A Morris once wrote: "The hoop snake is supposed to be an acrobatic serpent that takes his tail in his mouth and rolls merrily along hoop-fashion when he wants to go places," referring to a beast consigned by all respectable authority to the jolly precincts of American comic legend. Jutting vertically from the tip of the tail is a horn, which this dangerously venomous snake holds in its mouth or inside an opening on its forehead as it propels itself. The poison of the hoop snake (also known as the horn snake) is so deadly that it would kill a tree if the snake stuck its horn into it. "Although stories about this creature are not uncommon," Morris chirpily intoned, "it is always someone's uncle's brother's cousin that sees it."¹

Um - not quite. Up till a few decades ago, American newspapers regularly covered alleged hoop snake sightings, giving names and locations, even if with a bit of a smirk. Occasionally, newspaper editors' dismissal of hoop snakes drove offended readers to provide written testimony to their own sightings. Any biologist who publicly derided the belief could count on a flood of protests from self-identified witnesses.

In 1912, a Pennsylvania zoologist offered a tongue-in-cheek reward for a specimen of a hoop snake. While no specimen showed up, plenty of eye-witness claims soon crowded his mailbox. According to an article in the *Reading Eagle* (9 August):

"One woman in Chelsea, Mich., writes... that when she was a small girl, while berrying, she saw two old hoop snakes with five young ones, and when they were disturbed they took their tails in their mouths

READERS WROTE IN WITH HOOP SNAKE SIGHTINGS

and rolled out of danger. A man in Redlands, Cal., says he and his brother saw a hoop snake which was captured and is now in the State Normal School in Illinois. From McCleansburg, Ill., and Long Island, N.Y., come letters from people who say that they have seen hoop snakes that took the horny protuberances on their tails in their mouths and forming a perfect hoop rolled away."

The same article makes the point that such experiences reportedly occurred years or decades before, the implication being that the creatures owed their existence solely to the vagaries of memory. Some newspaper stories, however, chronicled more recent incidents - some allegedly from as little as a day previous, like the one attributed to Howard Shaffer of Pleasantville, Pennsylvania, in July 1905. Shaffer, it was said, encountered a snake fully 7ft (2m) long in a meadow near town. When he chased it, it "rolled up like a hoop" until he caught it and killed it. As is usually the case - happily for the doubters - there is no word of what happened to the slain specimen.

"There are many people who refuse to believe that there is such a thing as a hoop snake," Pennsylvania's *New Castle News* remarked in its 24 June 1903 edition, "but the fact remains that every once in a while someone bobs up who claims at some time or another to have

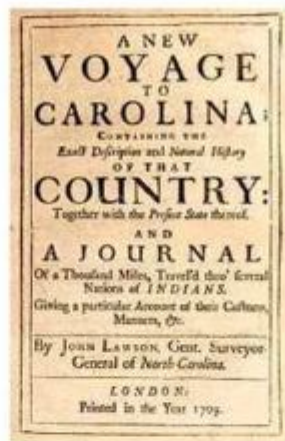
seen one." The paper had just related that lately Captain George W Crede Jr, a shooter at a local range, killed a 3ft (90cm)-long snake "with a horn-like tip to his tail about an inch and a half [3.8cm] long." No one had seen the creature propelling itself in a rolling hoop with the tip in its mouth, but the horned tail is one defining characteristic of the hoop snake.

HOOP SNAKES IN EARLY AMERICA

Reports of reptiles with one or more hoop snake characteristics can be traced to colonial America. In a 1688 letter to the Royal Society, John Clayton mentions the "Horn snake, so called from a sharp horn it carries in its tail, with which it assaults anything that offends it," so forcefully that it could penetrate the butt of a musket "from whence it is not able to disengage itself."

Writing in *A New Voyage to Carolina* in 1709, John Lawson recorded:

"Of the horn snakes, I never saw but two that I remember. They are exactly like the rattlesnake in color, but rather lighter. They hiss exactly like a goose when anything approaches them. They strike at their enemies with their tail (and kill whatsoever they wound with it), which is



armed at the end of a horny substance, like a cock's spur. This is their weapon.

"I have heard it credibly reported, by those who said they were eye-witnesses, that a small locust tree, about the thickness of a man's arm, being struck by one of the snakes at 10 o'clock in the morning, then verdant and flourishing, at four in the afternoon was dead, and the leaves red and withered."

In 1722, discussing the fauna to be found in the Virginia Colony, Robert Beverly noted the "Horn snake, so called from a sharp horn it carries in its tail, with which it assaults anything that offends it." In a 1779 work, Alexander Hewatt notes the presence of the "horn snake... which takes its name from a horn in its tail, with which he defends himself, and strikes it with great force into every aggressor. This reptile is deemed very venomous."

Five years later, in *Tour in the USA*, JFD Smyth, writing of a stay in western North Carolina, provided what may be the first printed reference to hoop snakes by that name:

"While I was at Sawra Towns, one day a little lad of Mr Bayley's came to acquaint us that he had killed a horn-snake, which being a curiosity that I was extremely desirous of observing and examining with particular attention, I accompanied him to the place where he said he had left it; but when we arrived there, to my great disappointment, it was not to be found. He assured me that it must not have been quite dead, and had recovered so much as to be able to crawl from the spot on which he had left it, and had secreted itself somewhere among the leaves.

"However, everyone, and all the inhabitants, with the great confidence asserted, and avowed their having seen such snakes, though very seldom.

"They represented them to me as the most formidable and direful foes in existence to the human race, and to all animation; poisonous and fatal to a degree almost beyond credibility.

"He is described as something resembling a black snake, but thicker, shorter, and of a color more inclining to dark brown. He never bites his adversary, but has a weapon in his tail, called his sting, of a hard horny substance, in shape and appearance very much like to a cock's spur: with this he strikes his antagonist, or whatever object he aims at, when he least expects it, and if it penetrates the skin it is inevitable and sudden death.

"So very virulent is his poison that it is reported, if he should miss the object he pointed at, and should strike his horn through the bark of a young sapling tree, if it penetrates into the sap or vital parts, the bark or rind will, within a few hours, swell, burst, and peel off, and the tree itself will perish.

"As other serpents crawl upon their bellies, so can this; but he has another method of moving peculiar to his own species, which he always adopts when he is in eager



ABOVE: A 'horn snake', as shown in Fisher's River (North Carolina) Scenes and Characters (1859).

pursuit of his prey; he throws himself into a circle, running rapidly around, advancing like a hoop, with his tail arising and pointed forward in the circle, by which he is always in the ready position of striking.

"It is observed that they only make use of this method in attacking; for when they fly from their enemy they go upon their bellies, like other serpents.

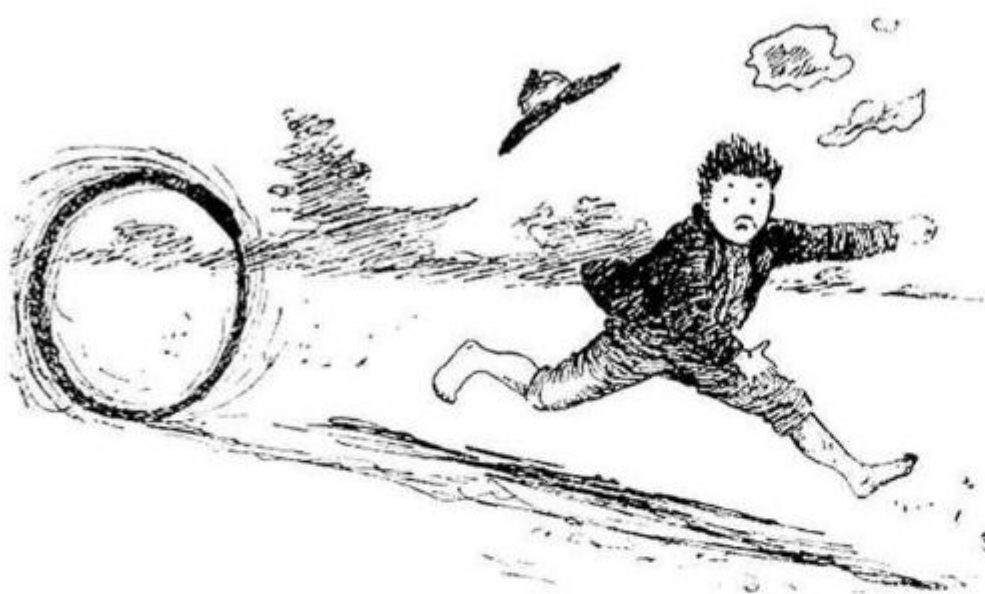
"From the above circumstance, peculiar to themselves, they have also derived the appellation of hoop snakes."

Two early books on South Carolina, John Drayton's in 1802 and Robert Mills's in 1826, mention hoop snakes by name. JH Hinton's *History and Topography of the United States* (1832) remarks: "The accounts of the deadly venom of the Horn-snake... are considered to be unfounded," though without quite making clear whether it is horn snakes themselves or just their poisonous stings that are mythical.

DISBELIEVED BUT PERSISTENT

Though newspapers from the 19th and early 20th centuries noted alleged sightings of hoop snakes, scepticism about their existence was even then widespread, perhaps more among the scientifically educated than among lay people. A few defences of the hoop snake stirred editorial writers, such as one in an 1886 issue of the *St Louis Globe-Democrat* arguing that, while the creature is undeniably rare, "that it exists is a settled fact".

In its 19 September 1909 issue, Charles R Pendleton, the editor of Georgia's *Macon Telegraph*, declared: "There does not seem to be any question now as to the existence of rare specimens of the horned snake, judging by testimony that is coming into the *Telegraph*." Pendleton had been encouraging readers to send in their accounts. John F Hall, a physician from nearby Atley, recalled seeing the



body of a recently killed specimen some three decades earlier. It was 3ft (90cm) long, close to 4in (10cm) around, with blue streaks running along its body. Two inches (5cm) long, the horn at the end of the tail “resembled the spur of a cock and was very hard”. Another doctor, WW Terrell of Douglas, claimed he had seen a hoop snake in Coffee County in 1905. Mrs RW Grubb, whose husband was the editor of the *Darien News*, remembered an 1884 experience near Thomasville when she and her mother encountered “a hoop about the size of a half barrel... rolling away from almost under my feet and [disappearing] in an old brickyard”. The *Telegraph*, reviving an incident from around 1879, interviewed the work colleague of a Macon mail carrier, George Smith, who claimed that a hoop snake chased him one day, badly frightening him while he was making his rounds. Smith, it was said, had stuck to his story to his dying day.

In the most recent encounter, JJ Frazier of Hazlehurst reported that the previous April he and Col HA King had killed a horn snake of “dark mottled green color”, a foot and a half (46cm) long, its horn three and a half inches (9cm) long and half an inch (1.3cm) in diameter.

Nothing about these stories betrays any obvious levity, and some were written by persons of good reputation and high status in their respective communities.

“ROLLED UP IN THE SHAPE OF A HOOP”

Here are some representative accounts, each of a then-recent sighting, from American newspapers of another era:

Marietta, Georgia, 5 August 1883: “While waiting in her garden, a lady of this place saw a veritable hoop snake. It had its tail in its mouth and was rolling when it was seen” (*Atlanta Constitution*, 10 Aug). The same day, a witness “discovered on the Western and Atlantic railroad track, just

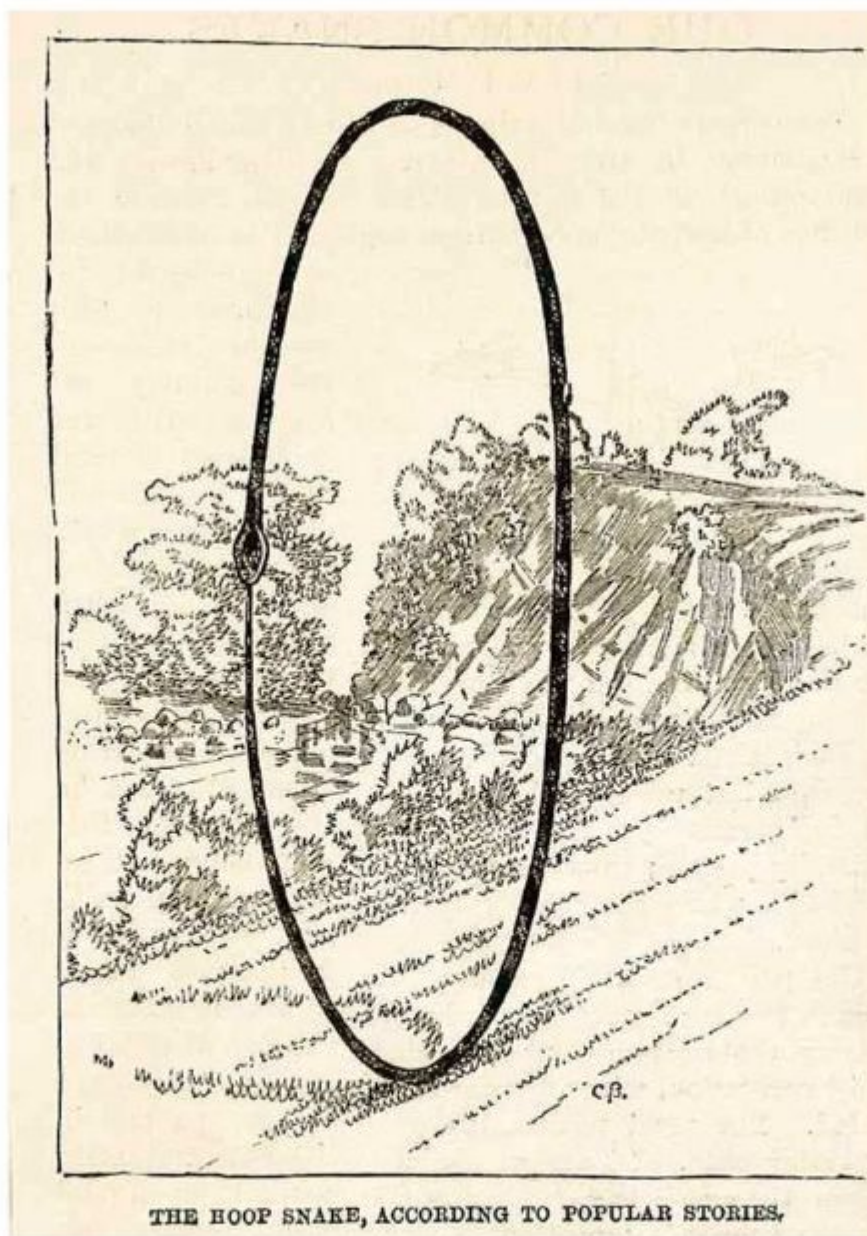
TOP AND ABOVE: Two charmingly fanciful artistic impressions of hoop snakes doing what they do best.

above the railroad bridge, a large snake about three feet [90cm] long, black in color with yellow spots on its sides. Apparently it had its tail in its mouth, and was rolling over like a hoop. It disappeared among some bushes on the side of the railroad embankment, and an hour’s search for it proved fruitless. It was doubtless of that species known as the hoop snake.” (*Atlanta Constitution*, 12 Aug, quoting *Marietta Journal*).

Peru, Indiana, May 1886: “James Nolan... discovered the reptile in a ravine, and when it saw him it rolled up in the shape of a hoop, but he struck it with a club and disabled it. Mr Nolan had never seen a hoop snake, but had heard of it and noticed that when he touched the body with a stick the tail at once struck the stick with considerable force. He experimented some time until thoroughly convinced that he had found a genuine hoop snake. After it was entirely dead, Mr Nolan cut off the needle in the end of the snake’s tail, and now has it in a bottle... The needle or sting is seven 10ths of an inch long, looks like a thorn from a locust tree, and is of black color. The snake is 5 feet and 6 inches [1.7m] long... The remains are still where the snake was killed.” (*Logansport Pharos*, 7 June, citing *Peru Sentinel*).

Near Port Byron, New York, 28 August, 1902: “Two young men were driving along a country road... when their horse became frightened from a cause not at first apparent to them. The horse suddenly bolted and ran down the road and they did not discern the cause until they glanced down and saw a large hoop snake rolling along beside the horse... When they quieted the horse they got out and killed the snake, which measured four feet [1.2m].” (*Ogdensburg Daily Journal*, 1 Sept).

Hickory, North Carolina, 3 August 1918: “Messrs. Oscar and Mack Hefner... killed a hoop snake... As the young men were working in the field Saturday afternoon three dogs struck a rabbit’s trail and were running it. Across the cornfield they ran and into the hoop or horn snake. The reptile coiled into a roll, with its two-inch [5cm] horn projecting from its head, and struck out after the dogs. It hit a small dog in the chest and the wounded animal ran about




THE HOOP SNAKE, ACCORDING TO POPULAR STORIES.

HOOP SNAKE ATTACKS WOMAN
Mrs. Scott, Of Newport News, Bitten On The Foot.
 Newport News, Va., July 27.—While returning to her home, 830 Twenty-eighth street, from the Second Baptist Church at night Mrs. J. H. Scott was attacked and bitten by a large-sized hoop snake which rolled out of the grass of a vacant lot in the vicinity of Wickham avenue and Twenty-sixth street.
 Mrs. Scott was accompanied by her husband at the time and she gave a scream of pain and fright when she realized that she had been bitten. The snake bit Mrs. Scott just above the heel of the right foot, the reptile's fangs breaking the skin and causing the wound to bleed.
 Although badly frightened, Mrs. Scott was able to walk to her home, and there a physician cauterized the wound and removed the source of danger.
 Mrs. Scott said she saw the snake distinctly and observed it when it was rolling away after biting her. She wore Oxford shoes, which accounts for the peculiar location of the wound, the snake having bitten just above the top of the shoe.

CHASED BY HOOP SNAKE
 CROSS MILLS, N. C.—Deputy Sheriff Jones, while out hunting in the mountains, saw what he believed to be a hoop rolling down upon him. He dodged and the hoop followed. Realizing it was a hoop snake, he ran behind a tree and the snake struck the tree with such force the small end of its tail penetrated the bark. Jones killed the snake at his leisure and brought it home as a souvenir.

HORNED SNAKE—IT STINGS WITH SHARP TAIL



J. S. Brown, of Cedar, Ky., exhibited a fast tern recently a most remarkably horned snake, which he showed up in a field on his place on April 1. The snake has near the end of its tail a long, horn horn, which seems to a point as sharp as a needle. The snake when agitated, holds the end of its tail in its mouth and rolls like a hoop toward the object of its wrath, but just before reaching it the serpent stands erect when its head and thorax thrusts into whatever it would strike down. Mr. Brown declares that the horn of the snake is filled with poison, and that a blow from it is deadly. It is said that even a tree stung by this variety of reptile will, if the sap is up, die in a few hours.

A HOOP SNAKE KILLED.
 FLORIS, Iowa, June 10.—A genuine hoop snake has been captured by George Milton, a farmer, and is now on exhibition at this place. It is about 15 inches in length, is streaked with black and white with a spiked tail, and is of a bronzed color on top of its head. Between the eyes is a small socket in which the end of the spike tail fits when coiled up like a hoop. Mr. Milton was in the field plowing when he saw an object like a hoop roll down and strike his plow beam with its tail. He saw that it was a snake, and when it attempted to roll away he struck it on the head with a club and killed the reptile. Mr. Ramsey, a druggist, has preserved it in alcohol. It is a reptile rarely seen in this country. This species of snake is said to be more poisonous than the rattlesnake.

ABOVE: A collection of news reports dealing with hoop snakes, in which they attack women and chase deputy sheriffs, but are sometimes killed and exhibited.

25 steps before falling dead. The snake struck two other dogs but the poison was emitted with the first stroke. The horn is located in the tail and as the snake runs it winds itself into a ball, with the horn protruding, and strikes with much velocity. Mr. [Oscar] Hefner said he went to view the dead snake Sunday afternoon and there saw [a] blacksnake swallowing it. He killed the black reptile. Horn snakes are not supposed to be in this part of the country, but have been seen many times in the mountains” (*Statesville Landmark*, 9 Aug, citing *Hickory Record*).

Near Middle Grove, Missouri, 16 July 1929: “Miss Ruth Blaker... was picking blackberries... near the home and on returning from the berry patch to the path that led to the house she heard something at the side, and, looking around, noticed a large blacksnake stretched out on some bushes, the reptile being about six feet [1.8m] long... She [also] heard something on the ground close to her feet, and there saw another snake of a different kind. She succeeded in finding a piece of rail close by, and captured the snake. Miss Blaker carried it to the house and inquiry was made as to what kind of snake it was. Examination showed it to have a needle on the end of its tail, and, when bothered or pressed on its back, would thrust out the needle quite a bit further. The snake was about three feet six inches [1m] long, and was brownish-black in color, covered with small yellow spots. Many people have viewed the snake, and some of them, more than 70 years old, say it is the first hoop snake they ever saw. The hoop snake is very poisonous, killing whatever it strikes with the tail needle” (*Monitor-Index and Democrat*, Moberly, 23 July).

HOOP SNAKES LIVE!

Hoop snake sightings did not end in the early decades of the 20th century, but as with other kinds of outré experiential claims, persons who believed they had encountered such reptiles did not rush to draw attention to themselves.

“WHEN IT SAW HIM IT ROLLED UP IN THE SHAPE OF A HOOP... HE STRUCK IT WITH A CLUB”

In an article from 1 December 2000, *Houston Chronicle* writer Leon Hale recalled a recent lunch at the upscale Riverdale Country Club. There, a woman told him of a strange experience which commenced when she heard her husband’s voice shouting from the distance, “Open the door! Open the door!” When she opened the back door, she saw him running at high speed. Close behind was a large snake, its tail in its mouth, rolling like a wheel after him. The husband rushed into the house and slammed the door. The hoop snake disappeared under the house. “I have heard dozens of hoop snake stories over the past 40 years,” Hale remarked without elaborating.

Software engineer Robert Benjamin, who grew up in rural Pennsylvania (a state with a long tradition of such things), has written of his and his father’s sighting, sometime in the late 1960s, of a whistling hoop snake. The two were alerted to its presence when they heard the whistling. “Soon,” Benjamin asserts, “we could see a snake come rolling down the field in our direction. Dad started up the tractor and waited a bit as the snake got closer. As it neared us, Dad moved the tractor forward just as the snake passed by and flung itself in our direction.” The barb in its tail penetrated a tractor wheel, causing it to deflate and angering the father, who promptly killed the snake, still stuck in the

tyre. He cut off its spike and showed it to young Robert, who recalls that it “resembled a spine I had seen before in bullheads and catfish”.

As everybody from folklorists to herpetologists has assured the rest of us for at least two centuries, no such snake exists in nature. After all this time, in the absence of physical remains (other than purely anecdotal ones, that is) or even a theory of how a snake could possibly propel itself by hoop, no rational observer has reason to quarrel with that assessment.

Still, in the sort of paradox that fortune favors, hoop snakes – gloriously defying the either/or categories through which humans try to negotiate the world – *do* live, in people’s experiences of them. They are usually “explained” as known but harmless snakes, radically misperceived by persons too frightened or unschooled to know better.

As is so often the case when explainers confront discordant testimony, that testimony has to be reinvented in order to make it behave.

Just remember:

- 1 There are no hoop snakes.
- 2 Run like hell if you see one.

NOTE

1 There are similar tales of rolled-up and rolling, wheel-like snakes in Swedish folklore, where they are known as *lindorm*; see Richard Svensson: “The Serpents of Sweden”, *FT264:32–37*. In Britain, there is a tradition of ‘snakestones’ linked to ammonite fossils – which can be seen as resembling coiled snakes – and even of carving snake heads on to such fossils (*FT193:74*; *198:76*).

Author biography



Jerome Clark, who is enamoured of the fortune realm’s most hopeless cases, is author, most recently, of *Hidden Realms, Lost Civilizations, and Beings from Other Worlds* (Visible Ink Press, 2010). *Unexplained!* – the third edition of his survey of anomalies lore – appears in

September. A confirmed herpetophobe, he is scared stiff of even harmless snakes whose existence nobody disputes.

BÆTYL

Throughout history, certain unusual stones called bætlys were said to have fallen to Earth from the heavens and were believed to be sacred. **DAVID HAMBLING** examines some of the varied traditions of meteor gods from outer space...

In 210 BC, Hannibal's army was rampaging through the Roman heartland, annihilating superior Roman forces at every turn. The Romans badly needed a miracle. When an omen appeared in the sky, the Senate consulted oracles and, on their advice, called for a secret weapon in the war against Carthage. A new god (new to the Romans), the "Magna Mater" or "Great Mother of Gods" of Pessinus, was to be brought to Rome.

The Great Mother was a statue of the Earth goddess Cybele, mother of all living things, inhabited by the spirit of the goddess. It was suffused with supernatural power because it was not the work of human hands: it had been fashioned in the heavens and fallen to Earth. Cybele was worshipped by other names in other parts of the ancient world: Astarte to the Canaanites, Artemis in Ephesus before the Greeks, Inanna in Sumeria. And in all of these places, she was worshipped in the form of stones that had fallen from the sky, stones known as bætlys (pronounced 'beetles'). Nineteenth-century scholars called them aerolites; today we know them as meteorites. It's probably not a coincidence that the omen which required oracular interpretation was a meteor shower.

King Attalus, an ally who ruled Pessinus in modern Turkey, agreed to let the Romans have the Great Mother. Most likely this was because the Romans were his enemy's enemy, although, according to Ovid, he only complied after there was an earthquake and the goddess spoke to him. The stone was transported to Rome with great ceremony and, allegedly, a minor miracle – when the boat carrying it stuck on a sandbar, it could only be freed by the hand of a virtuous woman.

The goddess was received in Rome, and in spite of his military prowess, Hannibal went on to suffer what might be termed the Great Mother of defeats at Zama. The Magna Mater took a share of credit and became established in the official pantheon of Roman deities.

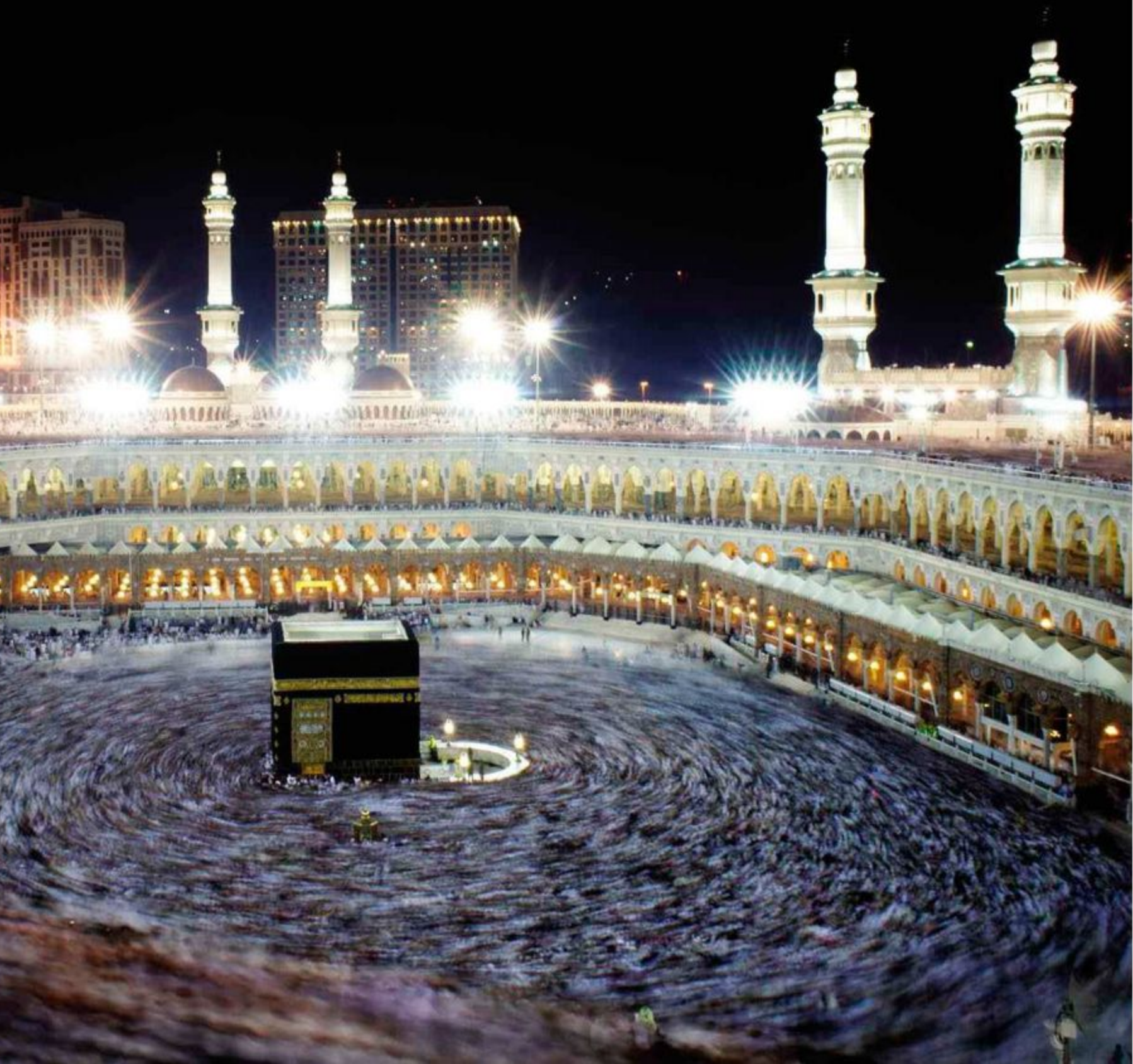
The Magna Mater was still in Rome several centuries later when a Christian writer called Arnobius described it in predictably disparaging terms: "nothing else in fact than a kind of stone, not a large one, one that could be carried in a man's hand without strain, in colour tawny and black, having prominent, irregular, angular points". The stone was now used as the head of a statue of the goddess, although it was faceless: "a rough irregular place as the sign of a mouth, and having no prominence corresponding to the face of an image".

The worship of such stones was widespread across the Middle East, and they were generally identified as being goddesses in spite of the lack of resemblance to human figures. At the heart of the temple of Artemis or Diana at Ephesus, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, was a miraculous statue mentioned in the Bible as having "fallen from Jupiter" (Acts 19:35). The temple was destroyed and rebuilt repeatedly and the original was lost, but copies show a vaguely human figure covered in curious ovoids. These have been identified as breasts or eggs symbolising fertility, or amber beads, or bulls' testicles, but they may simply reflect the knobbly texture of a meteorite. It's also worth noting that although the Greeks called the goddess at Ephesus Artemis, scholars suggest she was in fact identical with Cybele.

Delving back even further into the legendary past, according to myth Troy's



MANTIA!



greatest treasure was a statue of the goddess Pallas which fell from Heaven at the city's founding. This was known as the Palladium, and it was said that Troy could not be taken as long as it was within the city walls. According to Virgil's *Aeneid*, during the siege of Troy Diomedes and Odysseus infiltrated the city and killed the sleeping guards to steal the Palladium, which again was small enough to be easily portable. This was the turning point of the siege, without which everything else, Wooden Horse included, would have been in vain. According to tradition, after many travels the Palladium ended up in the Temple of Vesta in Rome, where no mortal was permitted to see it.

There was an abundance of bætyls around the Mediterranean and Middle East including the 'fallen Zeus' of Arcadia in the Peloponnese peninsula, the Phœnician Abadir or 'round stone,' and another Artemis in Tauris (ancient Crimea). Bætyls were important in the pantheon of the Nabatæan 'rose-red' city of Petra.

After the Magna Mater incident, the next time a bætyl took centre-stage was in AD 218 when 14-year-old Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus became Emperor of Rome. Having been a priest of the god El-Gabal at Emesa in Syria, he commanded the bætyl of the god, a conical black meteorite, to be brought to Rome. This stone was said to have a pattern on it which looked like the Sun. El-Gabal was Romanised as Heliogabalus or "Sol Invictus", the unconquered Sun, and raised above the other gods in a huge new temple. The Emperor, who was known as Elagabalus or Heliogabalus himself (FT251:21), had an assortment of sacred relics transferred to the new temple. These included the Palladium and the Great Mother, as well as the Shield of the Salii, a shieldlike piece of flat metal said to have fallen from Heaven and



LEFT: A statue of many-breasted Artemis from Ephesus. BELOW: A coin showing the bætyl El-Gabal, worshipped at the cult centre of Emesa.

with the power to protect Rome. There was also a statue of Astarte/Urania from Carthage, perhaps another bætyl. In fact, the Emperor seems to have been a bit of a sacred meteorite collector.

In a final religious twist, the Emperor identified his Sol Invictus with the god of the Jews and the Christians and ordered them to worship at the new temple. This might seem peculiar, but he was not the last to see connections between these religions and stones from the sky.

Whatever their supernatural powers, the stones did not protect Elagabalus, who was deposed and executed by the Prætorian guard after reigning for four years. His name was erased from public records, and many damning and implausible stories were circulated – that he dressed as a woman and worked in taverns as a prostitute, and had guests at a party smothered to death with petals. Some were probably invented to

justify his being deposed, but his meteorite-based religious leanings appear to be credible enough.



THE ROMAN EMPEROR COLLECTED SACRED METEORITES

NAVEL STONES

Another type of sacred stone also fell from the skies, typified by the Omphalos at the temple of Apollo at Delphi and its many imitators. According

to legend, the god Kronos devoured his children as soon as they were born, as he was afraid they would depose him. When his wife Rhea gave birth to Zeus, she instead wrapped a stone in swaddling clothes, and Kronos was fooled into swallowing this instead. Zeus did, of course, eventually depose Kronos. According to legend, he threw the stone to Earth at Delphi to mark the centre of the world, and it became an object of worship known as the Omphalos or navel of the Earth.

The current Omphalos at Delphi is not a meteorite but a sculpted chunk of limestone. It is a Roman copy, with a net pattern carved on its surface. Many copies were made, in Delphi and elsewhere, apparently as sacred markers indicating the centre of the world. It is hollow; tradition says that Apollo spoke through it to an oracle. Modern researchers have suggested that the Omphalos channelled fumes, which produced the oracle's hallucinated prophetic visions [FT127:21; 181:48–50].

Unfortunately, ancient sources are fragmentary or vague about sacred stones, and sometimes contradictory; Sanchuniathon's history of Phœnicia (written round 1200 BC) suggests that the "living stones called Bætyls" were created as a weapon against Kronos. He gives no details, but this implies that the

XOANON: MADE IN HEAVEN

Bætyls were not the only cult objects manufactured in Heaven. In classical religion, there is another type of sacred image not made by human hands and which is said to have fallen from the sky: the xoanon. Like a bætyl, this is an aniconic image of a god, abstract rather than being a figurative representation.

Athena was the patron goddess of the city of Athens, and the most sacred statue of her in this guise, Athena Polias, was described by the ancient writer Pausanias as having fallen from Heaven. It was a crude xoanon made of olive wood; according to



legend, the first olive tree was a gift to the city from the goddess.

Like bætyls, xoanons were supposed to be repositories of divine power or the homes of

spirits. The difference is that the xoanon was made of wood. It is one thing to believe a human-shaped piece of vegetation to be supernatural – curiously shaped root vegetables have a cult following to this day – but worship of an ordinary lump of wood seems strange. To add to the mystery, no original xoanons remain and all we have are copies carved from less perishable material. This means, ironically enough, that these replica xoanons are made of stone, just like the many replica bætyls.

ABOVE: An archaic chalk xoanon, c. 2nd century BC.

Omphalos might have been a bætyl. The idea that Kronos was fooled into targeting an animated stone just about makes sense in terms of the standard myth, but it's hard not to start spinning a new version.

Other bætyls are also credited with powers of communication. A sacred bætyl cared for by one Eusebius of Emesa also had prophetic power, producing a whistling tone which Eusebius claimed to understand (described in Steve Moore's piece in **FT153:50**). Like many bætyls, this one was treated as a living thing, wrapped up in cloth and anointed with oil, butter, honey or wine.

Another famous bætyl is the Black Stone of Paphos in Cyprus, home of the goddess Aphrodite, who dwelt there in the form of a triangular black stone. Although it is supposed to have fallen from the sky, the version now on display is composed of a type of volcanic rock called andesite. This stone is black, while ancient sources describe the original as being white – so it's probably yet another replacement.

Before leaving Cyprus, it's worth adding that in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Aphrodite turned Propætus's daughters to stone there. And in her home city of Paphos, Aphrodite changed a statue (possibly of herself) into a living woman when the sculptor Pygmalion fell in love with it. The two married and had a son called Paphos – who founded the city of the same name where the Black Stone was to reside. Statues and living people seem to be interchangeable in some mystic sense, and the Greeks are not the only ones whose creation myth has humans being formed from earth or clay.

UNDERCOVER BÆTYLS

Bætyl worship might appear to have been bulldozed aside by the great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But perhaps there has been some subtle assimilation.

In Genesis 28, Jacob falls asleep in the wilderness with a stone for a pillow and dreams of a ladder stretching between Heaven and Earth; from its top, God promises Jacob the land of Canaan. When he wakes up, Jacob declares the stone pillow to be holy. He sets it up as an altar, anoints it with oil and names it 'Beth-El', or 'house of god'. The temple built there became a major religious site, and some authorities believe that Bethel is the Semitic original version of the word rendered 'Bætyl' in Greek.

Gerald Avernay Wainwright's 1934 book *Jacob's Bethel* draws on many ancient sources on sacred stones, and finds a direct connection between meteorites and the thunderbolts of Zeus and their equivalents in other religions. Wainwright concludes that Jacob's Pillow must certainly have been a meteorite.

Stones play a significant part in modern Christianity. According to the Code of Canon Law governing the Catholic Church, Mass – the basic and most fundamental of sacraments – can only be celebrated on an altar made of a single piece of natural stone. The justification for this comes from 1 Corinthians 10:4 in which Christ



TOP: The Black Stone of Paphos in Cyprus – although the current one is made of volcanic rather than meteoritic rock. **ABOVE:** The Roman limestone Omphalos at Delphi. **BELOW:** Jacob's stone pillow, which became the altar at Beth-El. Was this the Semitic original of 'Bætyl'?



is identified with a stone. However, early Christians used wooden tables to celebrate Mass, so this tradition was obviously added afterwards.

The altar is the most important part of a church, and churches are named after their main altar. So the heart of every church is an altar, and the heart of the altar is a single rock. From a certain angle, this makes Christianity look a lot like stone worship.

God is frequently compared to a stone in the Bible, and Jesus is the 'cornerstone' of the church. Jesus renamed his disciple Simon as Peter, meaning 'rock', stating that "upon this rock will I build my church" in Matthew 16:17. Perhaps this was why Elagabalus associated his religion with Judæo-Christianity. Others did too: 25 December was celebrated as the birthday of Sol Invictus before it was Christianised.

The association of Islam and bætyls is even more controversial.

The most sacred site of Islam is in Mecca, inside the mosque at its centre. It is a black cube-shaped building known as the Ka'aba (the word means 'cube'), covered in a black silk curtain (see main image, pp46–47). Set into one corner of the Ka'aba is *al-Hajar al-Aswad*, the Black Stone, an ancient relic said to have fallen from the sky.

According to tradition, the Black Stone was dropped from Heaven to show Adam and Eve where to build an altar, like the Palladium and the Omphalos. It is now in several fragments, cemented together and worn smooth by the touch of millions of pilgrims. Every Moslem is obliged to make the pilgrimage to Mecca if they can, and they must walk seven times around the Ka'aba, kissing the stone each time. The volume of pilgrims means that most only get to point to it rather than touching it themselves.

According to the Hadith, the Black Stone was originally white but has been darkened by absorbing the sins of mankind. Again, it may not be the original; continuity is hard to prove, because it was lost for two decades in the 10th century.

Before Islam, there was a temple in

BOB TRUBSHAW

LOKATAH / CREATIVE COMMONS

MODERN METEORITE GODS

In 2006, local Hindus apparently started worshipping some of the stones from a meteorite fall in the Kutch region of Gujarat in India. "My son picked up one such stone and developed rashes on his hands. I believe these stones have been sent by God," one villager told the *Times of India*. One stone was reportedly seen floating in a puddle and was said to be from the goddess Dashama, a local folk deity. Geologists were dispatched to the scene but were unable to collect any meteorite fragments. <http://bit.ly/LF6Gjq> (articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com).

In 1993, villagers in Thailand started worshipping a meteorite which fell nearby. An altar was put up over it; according to one newspaper, people bought lottery tickets with numbers they thought they could read on its surface. The meteorite was taken away by the local governor who claimed that anything falling from the sky was government property. <http://bit.ly/MW3WOa> (articles.

[orlandosentinel.com](http://bit.ly/LF6Gjq)).

In January 2005, AFP reported that a 5kg (11lb) meteorite narrowly missed the village in the Cambodian province of Banteay Meanchey. "The rock is a little bit black and was hot, and looks strange compared to other rocks," said police chief Sok Sareth. The police were planning to hand it to scientists, but local villagers asked to set up a shrine. There were no further stories on the outcome. <http://bit.ly/RWTUvg> (tech.groups.yahoo.com).

On 14 August 1992, a shower of rocks fell on the African town of Mbale in Uganda after an explosion in the sky (right). Local residents believed the rocks were a literally Heaven-sent cure for AIDS; they ground some of the rocks into powder and used it as medicine. A Dutch team managed to recover over 400 rocks totalling over 100kg (220lb), and identified them as fragments of a chondritic meteorite <http://bit.ly/L6hAbB> (mindat.org).



DUTCH METEOR SOCIETY

Mecca containing 360 stone idols, including the Black Stone. Five years before he became a prophet, Muhammad was chosen to set the Black Stone into the wall of the Ka'aba after it had been removed for rebuilding work. When Muhammad later conquered Mecca, the idols were all destroyed and the Ka'aba became the centre of Islam, but the Prophet allowed the Black Stone alone to remain there.

Mainstream Islamic opinion is that the stone is purely symbolic, a relic associated with Muhammad. However, others take literally the teaching that "the Stone will appear on the Day of Judgment with eyes to see and a tongue to speak" and will pass judgment on all the pilgrims it has seen, in effect all Muslims.

Scientific opinion has waxed and waned over whether the stone is meteoric in origin. The balance of opinion is that it is not, though some still believe it might be a stony meteorite or meteoric glass fragment.

Of course, some Christian commentators see the Black Stone as an idol. The 1979 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* states, in the article on Arabian Religions, that: "Of the numerous bætys, the best known is the Black Stone of the Ka'bah at Mecca, which became the central shrine object of Islam."

HEAVEN'S WEAPONS

Meteoric iron was the only source of metal for the Inuit of Greenland, who regarded it

as sacred. They still do: a 1992 study found that meteorites are still treated as religious objects. One elder who was interviewed had an amulet containing a stone that fell when he was born. He believed that he would die if it left his possession, in a distinct echo of the protective power of the Palladium and the Magna Mater.

They were not the only ones to take advantage of this cosmic gift of metal; before smelting, meteorites were the ancient world's only source of iron. The earliest known word for iron is the Sumerian 'an-bar', meaning 'celestial metal.' Egyptians and Hittites both used meteoric iron, although it was extremely rare and presumably equally valuable. Metallurgical analysis has found that in the New World, the Maya, Inca and Aztecs also used meteoric iron, and the Namaquas of South Africa had assegais with spear points forged from it. The rarity alone may have meant iron weapons were limited to aristocracy or royalty, perhaps giving rise to tales of heroes or kings with magic swords. Naturally, such swords would reinforce the idea that meteorites were charged with supernatural power. One might speculate that King Arthur's heaven-sent Excalibur is a folk-memory of a sword with such an origin.

They may not have any practical use, but the awe inspired by meteorites still gives them religious power to this day (see "Modern meteorite gods" above). All this

might seem foolish and primitive, but shooting stars are still an amazing sight, and even in these 'enlightened' times educated people sometimes wish upon them.

Meteorites continue to exert a strong fascination. If we no longer credit them with supernatural power, they are charged with its modern equivalent, which is equally intangible, and yet real to those who believe in it: financial value. There is a global market in meteorites, and they are more precious than their weight in gold. They may not be worshipped, but meteorites are certainly revered, and for similar reasons today as they were in the past: they represent something wondrous and outlandish – a piece of the heavens descended to Earth.

FURTHER READING

Prof. Hubert A Newton: *The worship of meteorites*, 1897.

<http://bit.ly/NH3tfa> (meteoritehistory.info).

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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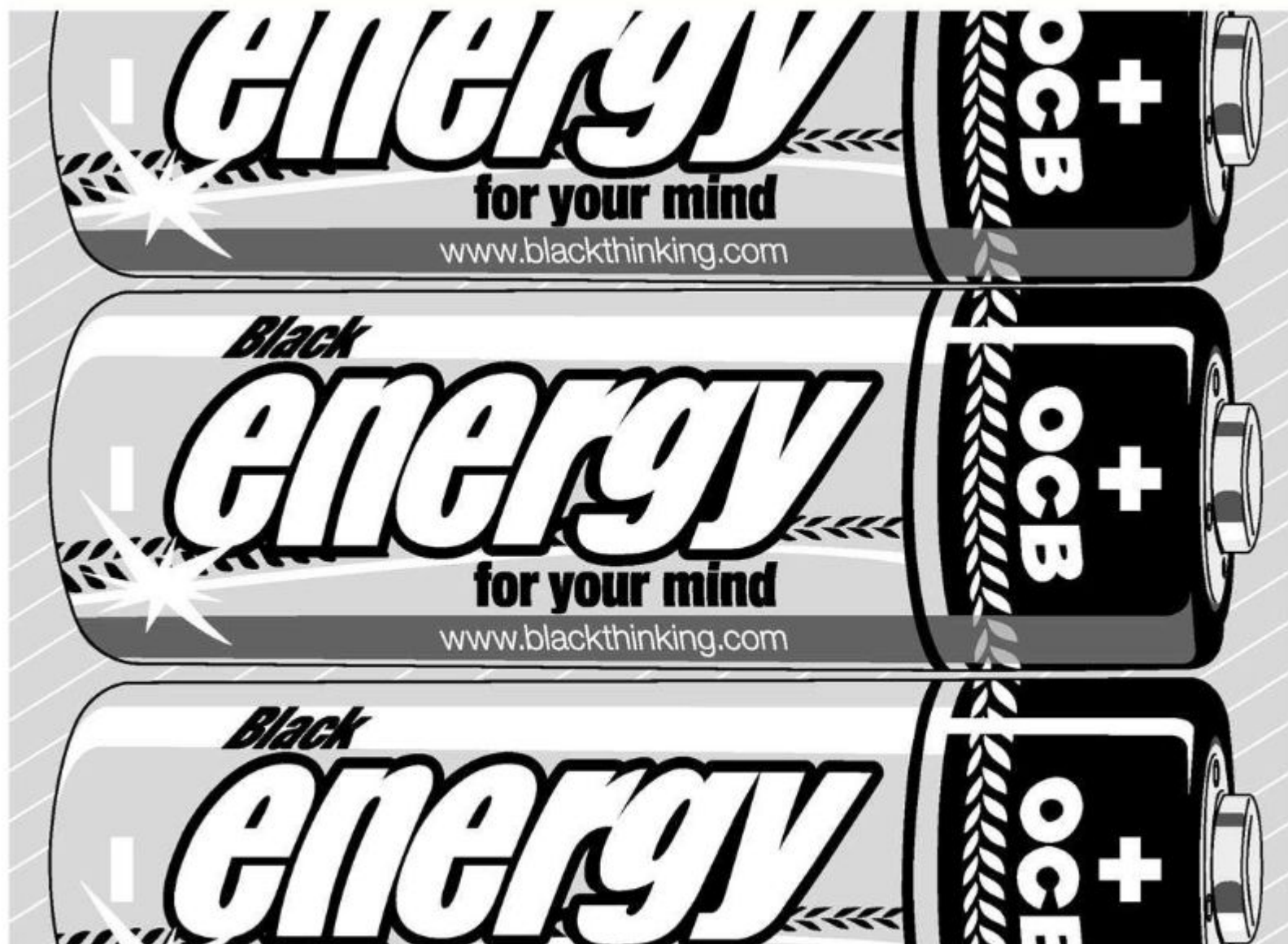
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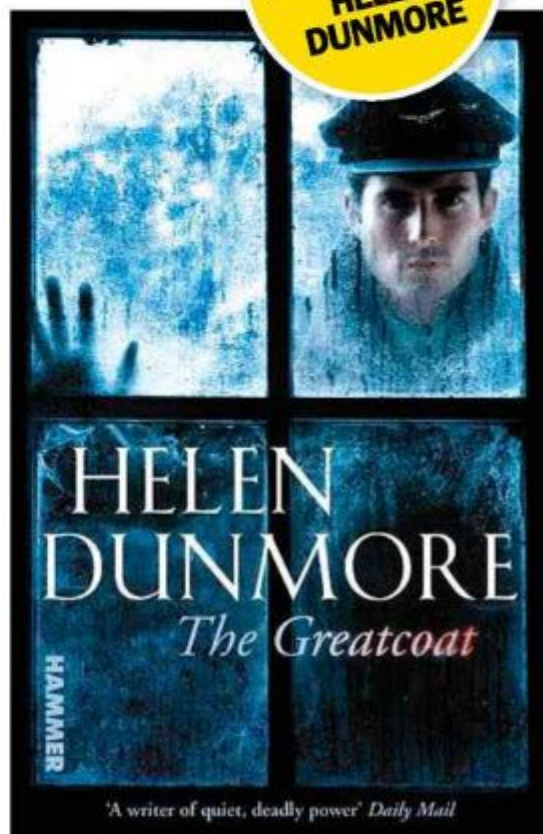
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Dark knight of the soul

Conspiracy theorists believe the Aurora cinema shootings to be a case of mind control. **CRISPIN ANDREWS** reports.



CRISPIN ANDREWS is a freelance writer from Buckinghamshire who writes about cricket, werewolves and Sherlock Holmes. He has never seen a single episode of reality TV.

Why would a man with no criminal record shoot 16 people at a *Batman* premiere, dressed up like Bane and calling himself The Joker?

Simple, say the conspiracy theorists: James Holmes was a mind-controlled assassin. And at first glance, the tragedy does have the hallmarks of a classic conspiracy. Around midnight on 20 July, half an hour into a premiere of *The Dark Knight Returns* at the Aurora Theatre, Colorado, a man dressed in a black combat suit detonated explosives, let off gas canisters and fired into the audience, killing 13 people and injuring 57. Now in custody, Holmes cuts a slightly puzzling figure. Blank-eyed and orange-haired, he claims he has no memory of the tragic events.

On 21 July, the day the story broke in the UK, newspapers variously claimed that Holmes was arrested in his car, crouched behind it, or at the back of the cinema. Not reported, so it is said, were alleged witness comments about a second shooter or a man in the cinema who received a call on his cell-phone and then let the shooter in. Holmes's car was first reported as having Tennessee license plates, yet Holmes lived in Colorado. Later, photos showed Colorado license plates. Such inconsistencies always spark conspiracy theories.

Next, there's the hastily arranged backstory to cover up what's really happening. A song blares out, on repeat, from the suspect's room on the night of the killings. Very John Carpenter. On 21 July, Holmes's Adult-Friendfinder 'sex personals' account asks potential dates if they'll visit him in prison. On the 22nd, it transpires that Holmes was refused membership of a local gun club, its owner concerned about a freakish, guttural voicemail from Holmes. On Wednesday 25th,

University of Colorado psychiatrist Dr Lynne Fenton finds a package in the University mail room. It's a notebook from Holmes. In it, he writes that he intends to kill people.

Then the profiling starts. Loner, ignores people, strangely quiet, socially off. Previously top of the class, he dropped out of university weeks before the killings. In the days leading up to the events, Holmes had been with prostitutes (moral degradation) and been refused by women (rejection). Lone wolf. Typical spree killer material.

Wayne Madsen on Blacklistednews.com reports that Holmes had been an intern at University of California San Diego's Salk Institute – site of a government super-soldier programme where scientists investigated machine-brain interfaces to enhance soldiers' performance. According to Beforeitsnews.com, Salk scientists also used a virus to make monkeys respond to suggestion. The same site claims that Holmes wrote a paper on mind control while at Salk.

Madsen adds that the killer's father, Dr Robert Holmes, was involved in programming computers to think like humans for HNC software. And psychiatrist Fenton previously worked for the US Airforce and was known for administering dangerous drugs. The Feds banned all Holmes's former schools and workplaces from talking about him. More cover up; but for what purpose?

Mind control, the conspiracy theorists say. "In the photos, Holmes's eyes are different sizes and point in different directions," claims author Stewart Swerdlow. "These are classic symptoms of deep programming."

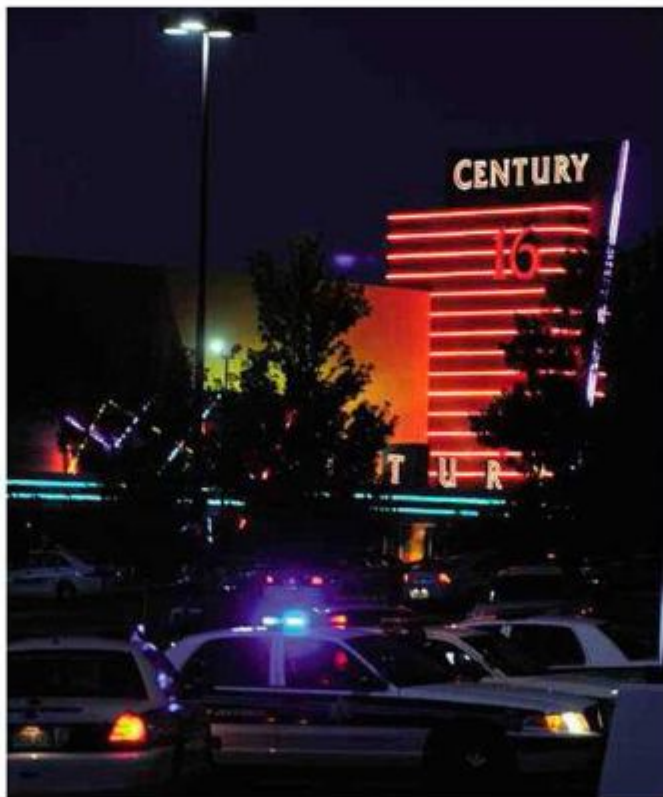
Swerdlow, who claims he was part of the 1950s MK-Ultra mind control experiments as a boy, continues: "It's usual for someone who has been mind controlled to have no memory of what they've done." He explains that the controller fractures the victim's mind and then pieces it back together in separate components, any of which can be triggered by remote transmissions or drugs.

Anyone who's been made to do an elephant impression by a hypnotist will tell you mind control is possible. When people did this deliberately, the ancients called it witchcraft.

This July, US scientists discovered how to control monkeys' behaviour using pulses of blue light to activate particular brain cells. Israeli scientists recently created an Avatar-like robot that can be controlled by a human from hundreds of miles away. Technology futurist James Canton says that soon governments will be able to alter the mindset of angry, rioting civilians and enemy combatants remotely, by beaming a signal at them. Scientist Guy Cramer claims the US military already beams negative ions at its own troops to improve morale, using Cramer's tech.

But who, today, has such technology and the motive to use it? CIA, Al Qaeda? Stewart Swerdlow says it's the aliens who have run Earth, from behind the scenes, for centuries. "This is a ritual, set up by the Illuminati, to enhance the energies the Olympic Games will release when millions of eyes are on London," Swerdlow says. "It's a sacrifice. The cinema's name, Aurora, is a bright light. It's like they were shining a light on their work, so all could see."

While James Holmes remains silent, the conspiracy theorists will no doubt continue to speculate... **FT**



Dominica's dead parrot

Dutch architect and painter Bartholomeus van Bassen included a mysterious bird on his most famous painting. **KARL SHUKER** attempts to identify this feathered stranger from a selection of known parrots and lesser-known ornithological sources.



KARL SHUKER is a regular *FT* contributor and the author of many books on cryptozoology and other fortetean topics. His *Encyclopædia of New and Rediscovered Animals* is out now from Coachwhip Publications.

In 2007, I documented a number of mystery birds that have appeared in paintings by famous artists and may conceivably represent lost species undescribed by science (**FT222:42–44**). Since then, several additional examples have come to my attention, but perhaps the most significant is one that may feature a hitherto unrecognised depiction of

a long-extinct bird officially known only from a single verbal description.

Bartholomeus van Bassen (1590–1652) was a celebrated Dutch architect and painter. Perhaps his most famous painting was “Renaissance Interior With Banqueters” – an extremely detailed, sophisticated work of art that took from 1618 to 1620 to complete. Having said that, although I naturally cannot help but be highly impressed by its scale and by the architectural splendours and opulence that it depicts, the most fascinating aspect of it for me is an ostensibly insignificant bird perching on a chair in the bottom left-hand corner. Closer examination reveals it to be a parrot, but

it doesn't appear to correspond to any species known to be living today. What could it be?

Whenever an identification of a mystifying bird in a painting is attempted, it should always be borne in mind that artists have often included entirely fictitious examples in their works, simply to enhance their visual appeal. In this particular case, conversely, van Bassen's painting is so meticulously executed and so accurate in all other details, including those of other creatures, that it seems highly unlikely that he would have added a made-up bird.

This fascinating case was brought to my attention a few months ago by

BELOW:

“Renaissance Interior With Banqueters” by Bartholomeus van Bassen (1590–1652).

INSET: A closeup of the bird seen in the lower left corner. Closer examination reveals it to be a parrot, but



pet expert and fellow author David Alderton, with whom I have since corresponded concerning this mystery parrot. With regard to the possibility that it is an ornithological invention on van Bassen's part, David shares my own view that this is improbable:

"What I would say is that the other animals in the scene are very clearly recognisable. Based on its position in the painting, and its perch on rare/expensive material, this tends to suggest that this parrot is significant. It would have been rare and exotic of course – representing a flamboyant display of wealth in a very clear visual way, and I can't see it would have been a 'fictional' bird."

So if we assume that the parrot represents a *bona fide* species, are there any that resemble it in some way?

On first glance, it recalls the Carolina parakeet *Conuropsis carolinensis*, a predominantly green-plumaged species with a bright yellow head marked with red. Once common in North America, it suffered greatly from habitat destruction, from being captured for the pet trade, and by being heavily persecuted due to its fondness for farmers' crops, until the last confirmed specimen died in Cincinnati Zoo in 1918. Closer observation, however, reveals a number of marked differences between this extinct species and van Bassen's painted parrot.

The latter has golden-yellow underparts, whereas the Carolina parakeet's were green; it also has yellow lateral tail feathers whereas all of the Carolina's tail feathers were green; its wing primaries are red, not green like the Carolina's; the red markings on its head are more extensive; and its relative proportions are very different. Van Bassen's parrot has a much longer tail, a more powerful beak, and, judging scale from the chair on which it is perched, a much larger overall body size. Indeed, in general appearance, the category of parrots that it most closely agrees with is the macaws.

Consequently, attempts to liken it to various small species of South American conure parakeet, such as the sun conure *Aratinga solstitialis* and the jenday conure *A. jandaya*, are not satisfactory either, unless of course the bird has been badly painted, with incorrect plumage and/or dimensions. For all of the reasons already discussed in relation to the prospect of its being a fictitious species, however, this notion seems untenable.

However closely one studies images of a painting, even close-ups of a specific section, there can be no substitute for viewing the painting itself directly.

Happily, David Alderton was able to do so, when "Renaissance Interior With Banqueters" was on display several years ago at the National Gallery in London. As a result, he noticed various features of the parrot not readily visible even in close-up images. These include the presence of a white brow line above its eye, and, of particular interest, the extensive amount of bare white facial skin – a feature that is characteristic of macaws. Usually this area is limited to the sides of the face around the eyes, and at the beak's base, but in van Bassen's bird it also extends onto the top of the head.

After viewing the bird directly in the painting, David wondered whether it might be a Cuban red macaw *Ara tricolor*, whose last confirmed wild specimen was shot in 1864, since when this species has been deemed to be extinct. However, in a short account of van Bassen's mystery parrot that he posted on his Pet Info Club website (<http://bit.ly/oitEry> / petinfoclub.com), he conceded that the Cuban macaw's plumage exhibited certain noticeable differences from the latter's, which indeed it does. The most significant of these are the Cuban red macaw's blue wing primaries, its red cheeks, neck, and underparts, its red and blue tail feathers, and the much less extensive area of white facial skin. Exit the Cuban red macaw from further consideration.

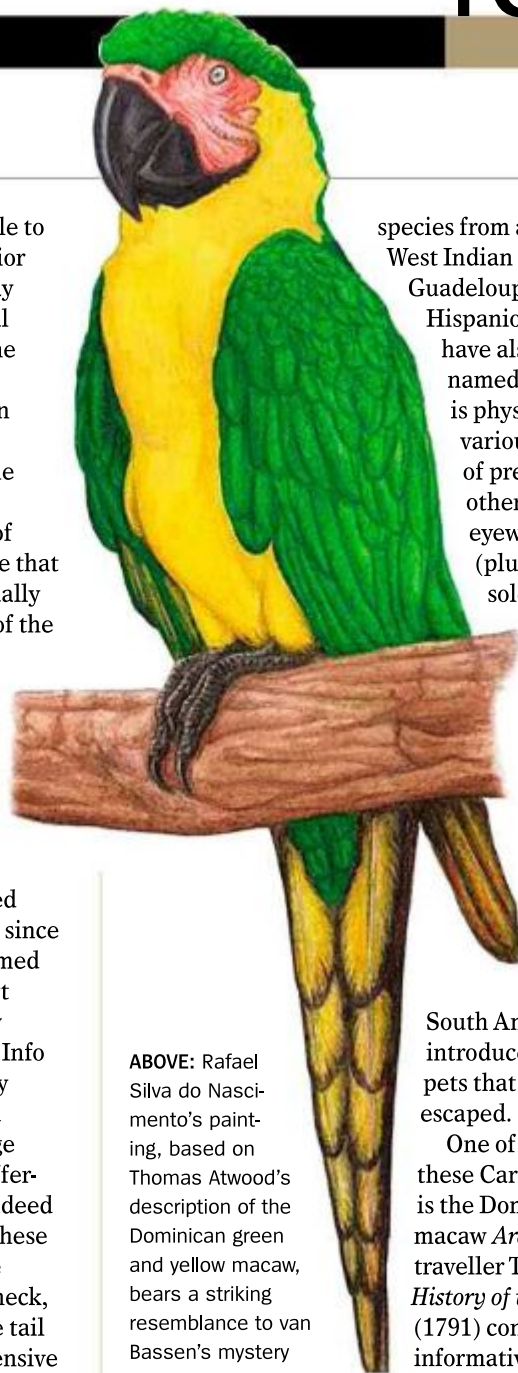
However, the Cuban red macaw is not the only extinct Caribbean macaw on record. Several additional

species from a number of different West Indian islands – including Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Dominica, Hispaniola, and Martinique – have also been described and named. Yet whereas the Cuban is physically represented in various museums by a number of preserved specimens, these others are known only from eyewitness descriptions (plus some paintings based solely upon them, not directly upon living specimens). And some of those descriptions are so vague that ornithologists have dismissed certain of the Caribbean's 'lost' macaws as hypothetical species – originating from confusion with known parrots, or even based upon specimens of various South American species of macaw introduced into the West Indies as pets that may have subsequently escaped.

One of the most interesting of these Caribbean mystery macaws is the Dominican green and yellow macaw *Ara atwoodi*, named after traveller Thomas Atwood, whose *History of the Island of Dominica* (1791) contains the following informative account of it:

"The mackaw [sic] is of the parrot kind, but larger than the common parrot [this latter parrot actually constituting two separate but closely-related species of much smaller Amazon parrot], and makes a more disagreeable, harsh noise. They are in great plenty, as are also parrots in this island; have both of them a delightful green and yellow plumage, with a scarlet-coloured fleshy substance from the ears to the root of the bill, of which colour is likewise the chief feathers of the wings and tails. They breed on the tops of the highest trees, where they feed on the berries in great numbers together; and are easily discovered by their loud chattering noise, which at a distance resembles human voices. The mackaws cannot be taught to articulate words; but the parrots of this country may, by taking pains with them when caught young. The flesh of both is eat [sic = edible], but being very very fat, it wastes in roasting, and eats dry and insipid; for which reason, they are chiefly used to make soup of, which is accounted very nutritive."

It certainly must have been, because however plentiful these macaws were



ABOVE: Rafael Silva do Nascimento's painting, based on Thomas Atwood's description of the Dominican green and yellow macaw, bears a striking resemblance to van Bassen's mystery parrot.

BELOW: The Cuban red macaw, from Lord Walter Rothschild's *Extinct Birds* (1907).





in Atwood's day, their numbers must have swiftly diminished thereafter, because his description is all that remains to suggest that they ever existed. No other reports of them, and no preserved specimens or paintings of living specimens, are known – unless...

There is no doubt that Atwood's description of the Dominican green and yellow macaw accords well with the parrot in van Bassen's painting – incorporating the precise configuration of its head's red coloration, its red wing feathers, and obviously its predominantly green and yellow plumage. True,

Atwood did not mention any area of white on the Dominican macaws' faces, but it is worth noting that in some species of macaw this region turns red if the bird becomes excited, so perhaps he simply didn't observe any macaws when in a quiescent state, only when they were squawking animatedly while feeding.

Consequently, the only inconsistency in appearance between van Bassen's bird and Atwood's Dominican macaws is the mention of red tail feathers in his description, whereas the central tail feathers of van Bassen's parrot are

green and the lateral ones are yellow. Perhaps, however, there was a slight degree of variation in the plumage coloration of the Dominican macaw (sexual dimorphism, for instance?) that could account for this discrepancy. In all other respects, the match is much closer than for any other species, living or extinct.

In 2011, a year *before* I made known to him the mystery parrot in van Bassen's painting, Brazilian bird artist Rafael Silva do Nascimento had prepared a beautiful painting of his own, reconstructing the likely appearance of the Dominican green and yellow macaw as based upon Atwood's description of it, which is reproduced here with Rafael's kind permission. As you can see, his macaw and van Bassen's parrot, prepared independently of one another, accord very closely indeed, providing further confirmation of just how well Atwood's verbal description compares with van Bassen's painted bird.

So could it be that the enigmatic parrot perched in this highly renowned Dutch artist's early 17th-century painting was a living Dominican green and yellow macaw, brought back to Europe as an eye-catching pet by (or for) a wealthy Dutch citizen? During that period, all manner of rare and extremely exotic fauna were being transported here from every known corner of the globe, many of which had never before been seen in Europe. Consequently, a colourful macaw would be nothing special or unexpected on that score.

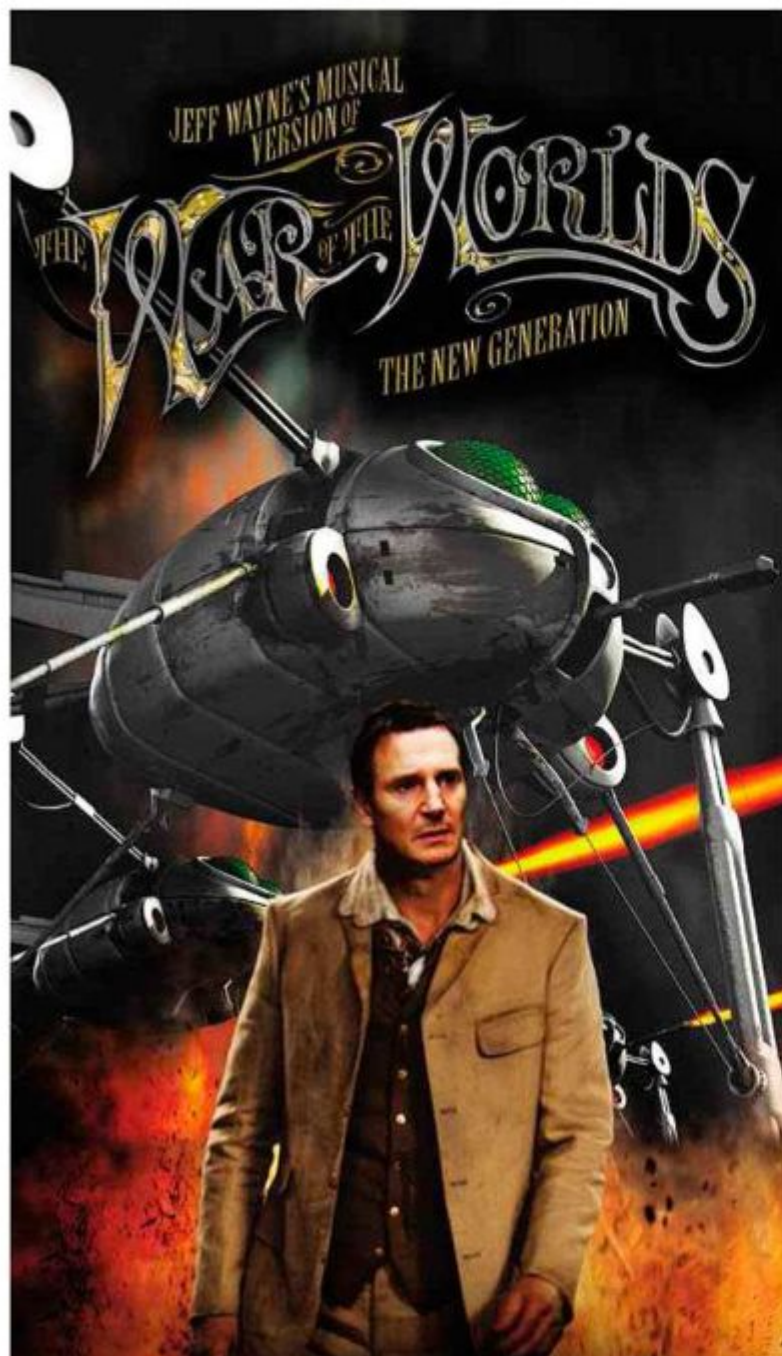
What would be very special, and extremely unexpected, conversely, is if the macaw species in question subsequently became extinct but its exquisite appearance was preserved under the very nose of every art-lover in an extremely famous, spectacular painting, yet without its identity or zoological significance being recognised – until now?

If true, this is a great tragedy. After all, to paraphrase a certain classic comedy sketch from the golden age of British television, it may be an ex-parrot, but it had beautiful plumage.

I wish to thank David Alderton for bringing this extremely intriguing crypto-ornithological mystery to my attention and for sharing his thoughts and information concerning it; to Michael Klauke, Associate Registrar for Collections at the North Carolina Museum of Art, for making available some high-resolution and close-up images of van Bassen's painting and its mystifying parrot; to Rafael Silva do Nascimento for permitting me to include his Dominican macaw painting here and also for providing me with a copy of Atwood's original description of Dominica's macaws; and to all of my Facebook friends who offered opinions and suggestions. **FT**

ABOVE: John James Audubon's painting of a flock of Carolina parakeets.

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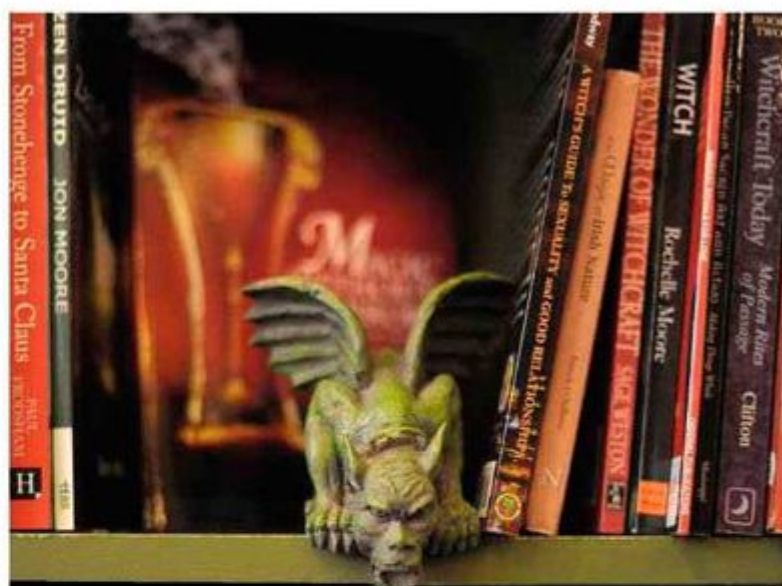
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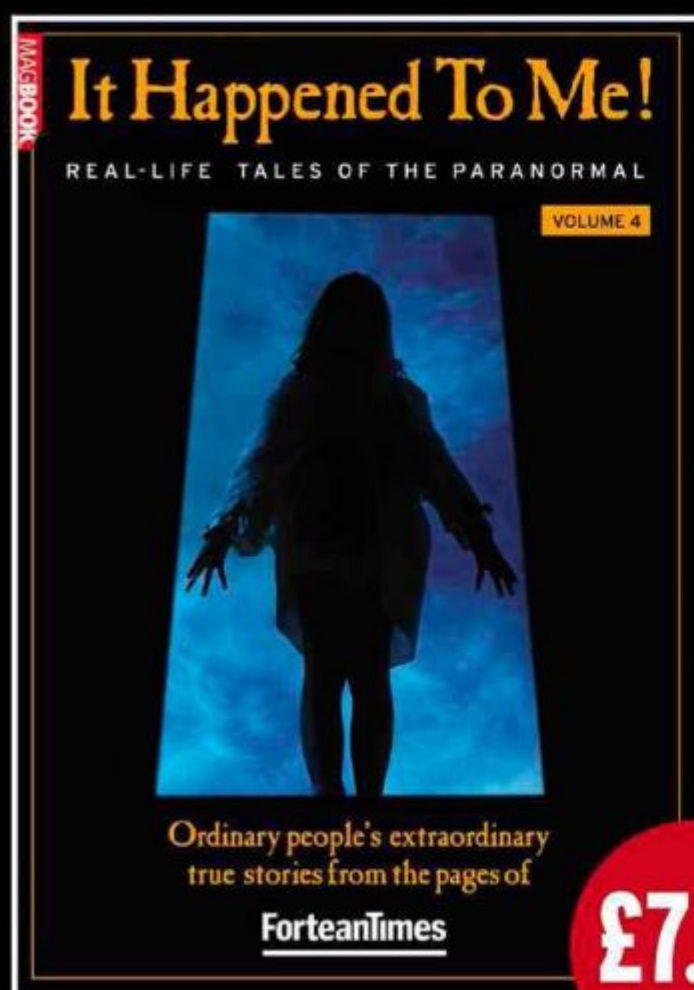


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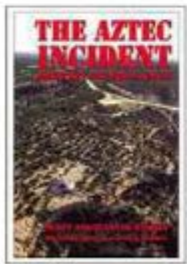
This month's books, films and games

reviews



Did aliens crash land in Aztec?

UFO buffs have avoided the tale of the flying saucer full of dead aliens like the plague ever since it was exposed as a fake, but the Ramseys want us to reconsider...



The Aztec Incident

Recovery at Hart Canyon

Scott & Suzanne Ramsey

Aztec.48 Productions

Pb, 221pp; illus, \$24.95, ISBN 9780985004606

AVAILABLE FROM WWW.THEAZTECINCIDENT.COM

The Aztec story as usually told (e.g., FT181:30–36; 287:50–52) is that one Silas Mason Newton and a 'Dr Gee', later identified as Leo GeBauer, told Hollywood journalist Frank Scully a tall story about a landed UFO with dead aliens inside it, which yarn Scully reproduced in *Behind the Flying Saucers* (1950). Then in 1952 San Francisco journalist John P Cahn revealed the nature of the con, and in 1953 Newton and GeBauer were convicted for touting fake kit (for detecting oil deposits) that, they said, had been reverse-engineered from alien technology. Since when, UFO buffs have avoided the Aztec case as they would a reeking alcoholic who, for fun, drops starving rats into babies' prams.

The Ramseys want to rehabilitate Scully and his story. They tell us that they have spent 23 years researching this book – so much work, for so few pages! They would like us to think they've unearthed enough evidence to persuade everyone that a 99ft (30m)-wide flying saucer landed in the hills above Aztec, New Mexico, in March 1948. They haven't, and it'll take a few more years at their present pace if they're to succeed.

Granted, they have found one person who says he was up there on the mesa and touched the grounded disc. They've also heard plenty of foaftales from others whose (mostly deceased) friends, family or chance acquaintances said they were there too. They also tracked down Newton's unfinished autobiography, and show that JP Cahn's motives in debunking the story may not have been entirely pure, though they may not be the ones they pin on him. They establish that a partly-dismantled massive craft could have been hauled off the mesa without being especially conspicuous. As far as it goes, this is new and useful. They have a crack – but this is where other cracks start to show – at identifying the anonymous scientists who made up Newton/Scully's allegedly composite 'Dr Gee'.

The Ramseys give us profiles of the founders of Geophysical Systems Inc (GSI), which became Texas Instruments, and a couple of other candidates. GSI developed a magnetic anomaly detector (MAD) that detected submerged submarines in World War II. If an alien craft that pancaked to Earth in the late '40s was powered by magnetic forces, these might indeed be the go-to guys to analyse its drive system. At the same time, the Ramseys suggest, Silas Newton was using GSI's MAD technology to find oil and water deposits. Or maybe it was their ground sonar system. They can be vague about details.

What they don't do is establish a firm connection between Newton, or GeBauer, and any of these scientists – all working for the US government during the war – beyond the feeble remarks that in searching for someone to

"Was Silas Newton the buccaneer oil millionaire he claimed to be? Records must exist"

test GSI's invention in the '30s, "everyone in the oil business knew... of Silas Newton" and, thoroughly ambiguously, "Without a doubt, those connected with GSI possibly [*sic*] knew or worked with Silas Newton." Who or what Newton was, is never properly explored. Was he the buccaneer oil millionaire he claimed to be and they take him for? Records must exist: have they looked for them? One possibility is that he was operating a Ponzi scheme (see p59), but that doesn't cross their minds. The Ramseys make much of the FBI's interest in Frank Scully, not seeming to know of his hard-left politics, which would have made him interesting to J Edgar Hoover. Hard information about GeBauer is even skimpier.

Worse yet is the Ramseys' naïve commentary on Newton's (very selectively quoted) unfinished autobiography. Scully's chapter 'Some Magnetic Definitions' in *Behind the Flying Saucers* is one of the finest slices of pseudo-scientific gibberish ever quilled, but all we're told is that this "scientific discussion is very similar to what is found in the Newton manuscript". The Ramseys' book features a glowing foreword by Stanton T Friedman, who is pleased to be known as a nuclear physicist. His expertise apparently doesn't stretch to exposing this junk. (The Ramseys also

endorse 'Roswell', "now proven beyond reasonable doubt", and Friedman's hobbyhorse, the MJ-12 committee, whose existence also depends on circumstantial evidence. So it goes.)

One could pick other holes in the Ramseys' specious arguments, but it's more entertaining to spend a moment on their syntax. For there is a link between considered thought and the careful use of language. We learn that "Scully married his wife Alice". And that V2 rockets were intended "to break the morale of the British population as they dropped silently from the sky". What were all those people doing up there in the first place? And consider John Torrence Tate's mama, who "died in 1899 forcing the family to send John off to live with his uncle". She should have trained harder?

It's easy to mock this kind of book, but that is to risk missing its point. That has nothing to do with anything that happened (or mostly didn't) in Hart Canyon, and probably little to do with the sincerity of the Ramseys. What this slim volume will do is expand the legendry of crashed saucers and the networks of ufological associations and the supposed government villainy that underpin it. That legendry and the UFO myth answers a peculiar need for some people, and there are others who will cluster around it, as much for political reasons as out of conviction. Why this should be so is another argument. To see it whole, we need to take this book on at least two levels. Hence the high(ish) score here.

Peter Brookesmith

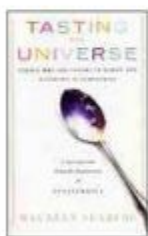
Fortean Times Verdict

BADLY HOLED BUT A GREAT
ADDITION TO UFO MYTHOLOGY

6

Tasting colour

Woolly New Age interviews and wishful thinking fail to convey a multicolour world



Tasting the Universe

People Who See Colors in Words and Rainbows in Symphonies

Maureen Seaberg

Career Press/New Page Books

Pb, 286pp, illus, bib, ind, \$15.99, ISBN 9781601631596

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99

To a synaesthete, these words might be multicoloured or music might make visible patterns. What could be a more beautiful window to consciousness? Journalist Maureen Seaberg's first book is a multifaceted take on this multi-hued phenomenon. Seaberg is uniquely qualified to write it, for she herself has synaesthesia: letters, numbers, days and months are accompanied by colour. Unfortunately, what might have been a wondrous tour through a Technicolor mind is instead an uneven collection of fawning interviews and soggy New Age musings. For example, Seaberg believes "the more one tries to connect with God, the more synesthesia is present."

Not that viewing synaesthesia through a transcendental prism is necessarily bad. It might be a fascinating direction to take, and Seaberg raises fine points about cross-sensory meditation states. But her spiritual hypothesis – that synaesthesia is a conduit to quantum consciousness – is supported by amorphous mystical impressions and lengthy quotations from people who were in *What the Bleep Do We Know!*? In the postscript there is even the utopian hope for a day "when the first openly synesthetic president of the United States... takes the podium."

Before the book's New Age turn, however, are chapters dedicated to possible synaesthetes like Itzhak Perlman, Billy Joel and The Amazing Kreskin. These profiles, of the musicians especially, are often less than convincing. When Perlman bows an A and experiences "red", for example, is he experiencing synaesthesia or simply having a metaphorical, emotionally resonant response to sound? Seaberg make little effort to distinguish between synaesthesia and creative impressions expressed through multisensory language. As with the New Age suppositions, an opportunity to study synaesthesia in a thrilling way – in terms of overlap between literal and metaphoric sensory drift during states of creative ecstasy – is lost.

The nadir must be the interview with Billy Joel, who associates certain songs with certain colours and claims to dream entire symphonies. So this makes him a synaesthete? The interview does not convince one way or the other, but Seaberg pounces on Joel's claims and makes him part of her tribe; there is clearly much wishful thinking involved. Seaberg then recounts her experiences at the Norman Mailer Writer's Colony. Why? Because "Mr Mailer certainly used synesthetic metaphors in his writing" and, perhaps more importantly, Mailer believed Marilyn Monroe was a synaesthete. Of course, Seaberg readily agrees. Along with a lack of critical perspective is the simple fact that Seaberg's aspirations for this book are too grand. It is part autobiography, part New Age inquiry, part history lesson, and part synaesthesia-meets-pop-culture rundown. There are too many colours and not enough focus.

Mike Pursley

Fortean Times Verdict

MULTICOLOURED BUT RATHER DIFFUSE AND A WEE BIT WOOLLY

4

UFOs and Water

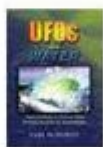
Physical Effects of UFOs on Water Through Accounts by Eyewitnesses

Carl W Feindt

Xlibris Corporation 2010

Pb, 478pp, illus, refs, \$23.99/£26.99, ISBN 9781450095344

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £23.99



In contrast to the glut of books on UFOs, there hasn't been a decent book about USOs (Unidentified Submerged Objects or Unidenti-

fied Submarine Objects) since Ivan T Sanderson's 1970 *Invisible Residents*.

As well as reports of objects entering or leaving a body of water, on the surface or moving beneath it, Feindt includes UFO interactions with rain, snow and ice.

Because of the huge number of cases, most reports are just excerpts of pertinent information, along with the date and location. At times, this lack of space works against Feindt. In the section about bubbling and boiling water apparently caused by USOs, he quotes an April 1963 case in the Atlantic, which is cited in David Group's *The Evidence For The Bermuda Triangle* (1984, in turn quoting Charles Berlitz's 1974 *The Bermuda Triangle*). The bubbling mass was 0.75km to 1.5km (2,500–5,000ft) wide and half that in height. That additional information about the dimensions of the disturbance would indicate that it is very unlikely to have been caused by a USO. A major underwater eruption, landslide or similar event is a more probable cause.

The least impressive chapter is on the testimony of abductees and the claims of underwater bases. Next to contactees, abduction cases are the weakest link in the chain of UFO evidence. Unfortunately, Feindt includes the infamous (and discredited) Linda Cortile/Napolitana abduction case.

Elsewhere, Feindt does an admirable job of sorting the wheat from the chaff of USO reports. There is the explanation that resulted from his extensive investigation into a mysterious underwater antenna photographed by

the research vessel *Eltanin* in 1964 (FT183:42–46; 184:50–54). He also suggests the probable natural origin of phosphorescent marine light wheels, which Charles Fort wrote about and which are still seen. Balloons, boats, buoys, fireworks, floating debris, fish, seaweed, a signal rocket and a diver cause undue excitement. As with UFOs, there are many causes of misidentification that can lead to USO reports. There is also the usual percentage of hoaxes.

What does Feindt make of it all?

After an in-depth examination of the effect on water in many UFO/USO sightings, he has devised a theory about the interaction between nuts-and-bolts machines with electromagnetic fields around them and the surrounding or nearby body of water.

This is unlikely to satisfy all readers, but at least it has been devised to fit the reported details of UFO interactions with water. He is the creator of the extensive site <http://www.waterufo.net> and his research into this fascinating aspect of the UFO mystery is ongoing.

Peter Hassall

Fortean Times Verdict

STUDY OF UFOs IN, ON AND UNDER THE WATER, SNOW AND ICE

8

The Ritual Killing and Burial of Animals

European Perspectives

Ed: Aleksander Pluskowski

Oxbow Books 2012

Hb, 232pp, illus, refs, £48.00, ISBN 9781842174449

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £46.00



Whether offering sacrificial victims to the gods or taking beloved companions with them into the afterlife, humans have been killing

and burying animals as part of their religious and magical rituals since early prehistory. Animal sacrifice makes us think of Viking funerals or the mummified cats of ancient Egypt. But how much do we really know about the killing and burial of animals? How can we be certain about what these practices meant – or even that they are what we believe them to be?

This new volume collects 17 papers dealing with various aspects of the ritual killing and burial of animals. Most of the book covers northern, central and eastern Europe. The subjects range from horse burials in Lithuania to carved dogs on mediæval tombs in Portugal. All explore the relationship between humans and animals in ritual behaviour, including the ways in which humans have attempted to take on animal qualities for themselves or use animals to make statements about their own identities.

One cautionary note comes from an early paper, Lee Broderick's 'Ritualisation (or The Four Fully Articulated Ungulates of the Apocalypse)' which suggests that some animal bone deposits usually interpreted as ritual may in fact have less dramatic explanations.

A collection of papers like this, carrying this high a price tag, is really only for the serious academic, but fortune tellers who have a chance to read a copy should definitely examine some of the papers, both for the strange and varied relationships between dead humans and dead animals and for Broderick's fascinating example of how the meanings of archaeological evidence can be thrown into question by a change of interpretive framework.

James Holloway

Fortean Times Verdict

HOW HUMANS HAVE TAKEN ON THE QUALITIES OF ANIMALS

9

Trade of the Tricks

Inside the Magician's Craft

Graham M Jones

University of California Press 2011

Pb, 289pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £19.95, ISBN 9780520270473

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £19.95



Whoever would have guessed that French magicians are secretive, sexist and often downright rude?

The author, an American anthropologist, attempts to study Parisian "magicos" the same way as he might investigate a lost Amazonian tribe. Along the way he goes a bit native, doing a bit of performing himself, all in the name of science.

The result is harmless fun, but it's a little duplicitous that the book is billed as a serious anthropological work instead of a personal journal. But no, the author insists it's science.

"As an anthropologist, my principal interest is how everyday life unfolds within the subculture of magic, among a community of magicians at a specific place and time," writes Jones. All, right, then, Mr Anthropologist, what are some of the more interesting findings?

1 The rapid cuts in contemporary film editing have had a major impact on stage magic. Audiences no longer have the patience to watch a trick that requires time and attention.

2 Magicians often patent their tricks. Sharing them *gratis* confers status upon the giver and recipient.

3 Audiences use smartphones to search for explanations for tricks, even while the act proceeds right in front of them. (We Americans have a special word for people like that. We call them "jerks.")

4 Since 1903, French magicians have had a trade union.

5 France is the only country to subsidise professional magicians.

6 Many male French magicians are absolute snots when it comes to women magicians, deriding their tricks as "too masculine".

And that's about it. There's a lot of pedantic framing and, oddly, a lot of clashing first-person hand-wringing as Jones embarks upon his own career as an amateur magician in France.

No tricks are given away, and the full spectrum of Parisian magic is viewed, from the youngest and most amateur to the most senior and professional. Avant-garde performance-art styles are also briefly presented.

In the end, Jones does deliver what he promised: a look at the everyday life of magicians in a specific time and place. And that's the main problem: It's too specific. It's not compelling. This book will be of interest to rabid magic buffs. A general audience, and even a fortune teller one, will find little of interest.

Jay Rath

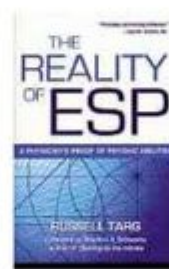
Fortean Times Verdict

TOO FEW 'PRESTOS' – THE PLEDGE DOES NOT LEAD TO PRESTIGE

5

Distant voices

An anecdotal history of remote viewing fails to make the scientific case for ESP



The Reality of ESP

A Physicist's Proof of Psychic Abilities

Russell Targ

Quest Books 2012

Pb, 303pp, illus, notes, gloss, bib, ind, \$17.95/£15.99, ISBN 9780835608848

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.99

Russell Targ has considerable expertise in laser physics, but is best known as a key player in the whole remote viewing/goat-staring military-psychic complex.

Rather than rigorous scientific proof, what you get here is a very interesting anecdotal history of remote viewing from someone at the core of the project, with descriptions of the work of the star viewers, analysis of their successes, and statistics that suggest the very best produced real results. It is implied that it worked so well that it went operational and remains so.

But the plural of anecdote is not proof; it's anecdotes. He gives many accounts of the best viewers and their work, but there is insignificant coverage of those who failed, and none at all of work (such as Richard Wiseman's on the experimenter effect) that suggests ESP is not real.

Unlike most writers on ESP, though, Targ makes an effort to provide a scientific mechanism

for the effect which can answer some of the claims that it violates the laws of physics. However, this relies on accepting Bohm's Holographic Universe approach to quantum physics; this is a valid interpretation, but is not supported by the vast majority of physicists, and Targ's use of it is highly speculative. He has the courtesy to do the maths and extrapolate from the results rather than just build fantasies based on written approximations of the physics; but as far as I can see, no testable predictions can be derived from this work.

Of course, whether this matters depends on the book's target audience. It won't impress many non-believing physicists or, indeed, parapsychologists; but it's probably not meant to. Quest is a Theosophical publisher, and it's clear that the book is really meant for New Agers who want some reassurance that science is at least partly on their side. There are constant uncritical references to mystic traditions and the cover quote is from Deepak Chopra (with 'MD' appended to his name). It has plenty of material that resembles science closely enough for an outsider to be satisfied. It's probably good enough for those with relaxed critical filters, but not for scientists who are seeking rigorous proof.

A definitive demonstration that ESP is incontrovertibly real remains as far away as ever.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

THE PLURAL OF ANECDOTE IS NOT PROOF; IT'S ANECDOTES

5

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The truth is out there

An excellent overview of research into the hunt for extraterrestrial intelligence is rewarding for the non-specialist



Communication with Extraterrestrial Intelligence

Ed: Douglas Z Vakoch

State University of New York Press 2011

Pb, 500pp, illus, bib, ind, \$39.95/£28.50, ISBN 9781438437941

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £28.50

In *Communication with Extraterrestrial Intelligence*, Douglas A Vakoch, the director of Interstellar Message Composition at the SETI Institute, edits a collection of essays written by leading scientists and researchers in the field.

Part I mainly examines advances in SETI techniques used to look for exoplanets, which are currently discovered primarily through indirect methods, such as measuring very slight “wobbles” in stars due to the mutual gravitational pull with orbiting bodies or the diminution of a star’s brightness when a planet passes between it and our telescopes.

As more exoplanets with terrestrial features are discovered, SETI scientists are more sanguine about the prospect of detecting messages from extraterrestrial civilisations. The vast length of the Milky Way Galaxy – 100,000–120,000 light years in diameter – will require much time for a thorough scan for radio signals. However, as SETI scientist Jill Tarter explains, Moore’s Law will soon mean that SETI computers and programs can scan greater areas and search for more complex signals.

At present, SETI concentrates on detecting deliberate radio

signals. Pulsed lasers could outshine our Sun briefly, so Optical SETI, first proposed in 1961, could offer the best means of interstellar communication.

Louis K Scheffer avers that large-scale use of solar power visible across vast distances could introduce another strategy. Presumably, an advanced extraterrestrial civilisation exploiting vast amounts of energy would produce a signature that could be detected.

Part II looks at active SETI strategies (the intentional transmission of signals towards selected stars and targets) and their implications. Kathryn Dennig discusses their appropriateness, given the risk that contact could be detrimental. It would probably be difficult to detect an unintentionally transmitted signal; thus, communication between civilisations will be unlikely until one of them initiates contact.

James Benford *et al* note that it is part of the human condition to communicate our existence. A civilisation nearing its end could feel compelled to announce its existence or plead for help; another could send out a beacon based purely on pride. Religion could be common in the Cosmos, in which case, aliens might send beacons to spread the good news and look for converts.

Michael AG Michaud explores history to speculate on the consequences of contact. Optimists, including Carl Sagan and Frank Drake, imagined that an *Encyclopedia Galactica* would answer all the important questions in science, engineering and social sciences. Pessimists point out that civilisations with which we came into contact would almost certainly be more advanced and could pose an existential threat.

Moreover, the history of encounters on Earth between civilisations is in large part a record of conflict and conquest.

The contributors to this volume seem to disagree with Stephen Hawking’s 2010 warning that contacting extraterrestrial aliens was “a little too risky”, but Michaud cautions that it is important to base our assumptions not on what we would prefer to believe, but rather, on science and evidence.

Part III explains how messages could be formulated so that alien civilisations could decipher them. Seth Shostak, senior astronomer at the SETI Institute, points out that senders might assume that they are engaged in one-way communication – even messages travelling at the speed of light would take many years – and be inclined to transmit long messages at once, since a dialogue might not occur.

Stéphane Dumas proposes an interstellar Rosetta State based on mathematics and physics. Information about the properties of the hydrogen atom, for instance, is universal and stands a good chance of decipherment. David Dunér expounds on the cognitive foundations of interstellar communication. In order to maximise the chances that our communications will be understood, Dunér recommends aiming our SETI efforts at exoplanets with characteristics similar to Earth’s, since there would be a greater probability of life forms similar to ours which would be more likely to understand us.

Vakoch’s volume is an excellent overview of the cutting-edge research in the field of SETI. It is geared toward a specialist audience, as many of the book’s 32 chapters are highly technical. Nevertheless, it will be enjoyable reading for anyone interested in the SETI enterprise which, if successful, is sure to have a transformative effect on us all.

George Michael

Fortean Times Verdict

EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO HUMANS OR A CHANCE TO LEARN?

9

The Vallance Bible

Jeffrey Vallance

Grand Central Press 2011

Hb, 32pp, illus, \$20 (+ p&p) ISBN 9780981798776

SEE BELOW FOR ORDERING DETAILS



“Because He was alone in the void, God became lonely and bored. God became so bored that He exploded.

God exploded in a big bang. In a mighty exhalation of light, God created space, time, matter, and energy.” Thus opens ‘The Gospel According to Jeffrey’, which is both short (three chapters, 113 verses) and sweet. Verse 20, “Everything is God”, sums up the author’s good-natured pantheism.

The handsome black volume, embossed in gold, is illustrated with Jeffrey’s inimitable drawings. The middle section of *The Vallance Bible*, ‘Three Beatific Visions’, narrates episodes of bizarre altered states experienced by Jeffrey when he was 20. In the book’s first section, ‘Jesus Exegesis’, he writes: “I see God in paranormal and unexplainable events, weird miracles, and in strange coincidents [*sic*] – most of which are ironic and/or paradoxical, and almost all of which are hilarious. And I believe that prayers are answered, although much of the time we seem to get the opposite of what we ask for. Sometimes God must protect us from what we want.”

As Fort said in *Wild Talents*: “I conceive of the magic of prayers. I conceive of the magic of blasphemies.” Fort, indeed, is included in a quirky listing of 44 hallowed prophets, along with Zoroaster, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Jane Leade, Tammy Faye Bakker, and John Selby Spong. (“Though I am no darling of the popes,” wrote Fort in *Lo!*, “I expect to end up holy, some other time.”)

US readers can order *The Vallance Bible* by calling Tracey at Grand Central Arts Center, 125 N Broadway, Santa Ana, CA 92701. T: 714 567 7233. In Europe it can be ordered from <http://bit.ly/M5E78R> (c-e-c.ch).

Paul Sieveking

Fortean Times Verdict

BOTH A WORK OF ART AND A SOURCE OF WISDOM

8

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

THE WEREWOLF BOOK: THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SHAPE-SHIFTING BEINGS

Brad Steiger

Visible Ink Press (visibleinkpress.com) 2011
Pb, pp368, index, chronology, £19.95
ISBN 9781578590787

This is a very professional encyclopædia from one of the field's masters, covering all things shapeshifter and not just "men who are hairy on the inside" (as Angela Lansbury's 'Granny' put it in *The Company of Wolves*). Steiger draws on material ranging from ancient lore to modern TV and films (and even computer games) reworking classic motifs. This companion volume to the same publisher's *Vampire Book* offers over 250 entries and makes a handy and entertaining reference.

ASSASSINATION: THE ROYAL FAMILY'S 1000-YEAR CURSE

David Maislish

Pen Press (www.independenpress.co.uk) 2012
Pb, pp495, appendices, illus, £9.99
ISBN 9781780031484

David Maislish's intention, as he puts it, is to present "the history of England and Britain without the things that sent us to sleep in school". And, having ditched the boring bits, his book rolls along nicely for nearly 500 pages with never a dull moment, offering a steady diet of murder and attempted murder. It's full of interesting stories – I didn't know, for instance, that WB Yeats's reluctant muse Maud Gonne had helped hatch a plot to kill Edward VII, or quite how many people had tried to do in Queen Victoria – but none of them really add up to anything we could credibly call "the 1000-year curse" the book boasts of. After all, being an English king or queen from Anglo-Saxon through to Tudor times was always a risky business, with some other branch of the family usually more than willing to bump you off. And do other mishaps and deaths – from Henry VIII's jousting injuries to the

injection administered to the dying George V by his doctor – really count as examples of assassination or evidence of a curse? Maislish has probably assembled the most comprehensive chronology of murder attempts, successful or failed, on British monarchs, but that's about as far as it goes: lots of fascinating facts, but not a very persuasive thesis.

GAWAIN AND THE GRAIL QUEST: HEALING THE WASTE LAND IN OUR TIME

Jeffrey John Dixon

Floris Books (florisbooks.com) 2012
Pb, pp213, index, bib, notes, £16.99
ISBN 9780863158742

Inspired by two pioneers of Arthurian lore – William Blake and Jessie L Weston, the latter a key influence on the TS Eliot poem that gives this book its subtitle – Dixon follows the Grail Knight, Gawain, through a mythical landscape in search of a healing that is mystical, spiritual and personal. Reading it is an intense experience, full of psychological, metaphorical and folkloric analyses of almost every element and incident in the legends about Gawain and his search for the Cup that held the blood of the crucified Christ. Particularly interesting are Dixon's thoughtful discussions of angels, phantoms and fairies, supernatural processions, mystical light, visions of Jesus, Holy Blood, and the relation between a weapon and its wound.

TRUCKER GHOST STORIES AND OTHER TRUE TALES OF HAUNTED HIGHWAYS, WEIRD ENCOUNTERS AND LEGENDS OF THE ROAD

Ed Annie Wilder

Tor Books, (us.macmillan.com) 2012
Pb, pp256, £11.99
ISBN 9780765330352

Britain and Europe have their road ghosts (as the work of Paul Devereux and others attests), but the USA is the country of the internal combustion engine; while its highways may be considerably

newer than our ancient lanes and trackways, its road-lore is arguably more extensive. And nowhere is this more evident than in the semi-mythic figure of the truck driver, hero of a thousand country songs and spinner of as many tales of life on the road – including its spooky side, as shown in the traditions of ghostly vehicles and phantom hitchhikers. Annie Wilder, who has previously written on haunted houses, has collected together a wide range of firsthand 'Trucker Ghost Stories', very much in the manner of one of our own *It Happened to Me!* collections. In fact, the material extends beyond ghost

stories to encompass pursuit by weird lights, UFO encounters, demon attacks, skinwalkers and even the chupacabras. Wilder's own wonderfully weird story of following a Michelin Man entity on Interstate-94 earns her some extra brownie points with us as she refers to "the UK's hipster paranormal magazine *Fortean Times*"! Some stories stretch credulity, some have endings that are a little too pat to ring true, but there are some real gems of weirdness here and the whole thing is perfect for late-night reading... but perhaps not as you huddle in your cab at a lonely truck-stop!

FORTEAN FICTION

Vril: The Power of the Coming Race

Edward Bulwer Lytton

Stockholm: Edda (www.edda.se) 2012
Hb, 158pp, illus, £25
ISBN 9789197953436



Vril is one of those books we've all heard of – we know it's about an underground civilisation; we know it gave its name to a famous meat beverage; we know that some ultra-right-wing occultists and conspiracists, perhaps even the Nazi leadership, believed it was true – but how many of us have read it?

Exploring a mine, the narrator discovers a race of humans who take him into their community, where all his assumptions about society are challenged. The Vril-ya, or people of Vril, have moved beyond democracy to a sort of benevolent dictatorship. There is no crime; no one is poor. Automata perform many tasks; the little manual work needed is done willingly by children, who have the energy and enthusiasm, leaving adults free to pursue whatever most interests them. Women are taller and stronger than men, and take the lead in courtship; they also make up most of the scholars.

And all use Vril, the ultimate power source. From a staff the Vril-ya carry, Vril can be used to make machinery move, or to heal, or to destroy. Other underground societies which don't use Vril (or which practice democracy) are regarded as savages.

Initially, it seems a peaceful and happy society – but this underground utopia is really a dystopia. There is no dissent; nothing is allowed to disturb the equilibrium. And because everyone is content, there is no tension, personal or societal; and without tension there's little creative art. It's safe, but stultifying.

Bulwer Lytton was a politician, poet, occultist and prolific novelist. First published in 1871, *Vril* set a science fiction standard: to illuminate our own world through exploring others. This is a beautiful edition, with a short but excellent introductory essay by Carl Abrahamsson and simple but quite gorgeous colour illustrations by artist Christine Ödlund throughout.

David V Barrett

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THE EDITOR, **FORTEAN TIMES**, DENNIS CONSUMER DIVISION,
30 CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON W1T 4JD, UK.



Kosmos

Dir Reha Erdem, Turkey/Bulgaria 2010
Drakes Avenue, £15.99

This Antalya "Golden Orange"-winning Turkish-Bulgarian fantasy directed by Reha Erdem is set in an isolated, unnamed border town (it was actually filmed in the town of Kars in north-eastern Turkey, near the Armenian border).

We're introduced to our hero, Kosmos, running wildly through the snow, apparently fleeing something or someone, when he comes across a mediæval snow-covered town, looking like some bleak fairy-tale kingdom.

His first act is to save a young boy from drowning. However, his tendency to steal and unwillingness to work soon make the townspeople suspicious of him (although, as we find out, all outsiders are treated with suspicion by this isolated community). He goes on to partially cure some of the locals of their ailments, although some of these miracles are not as successful as they would first appear.

Much of the plot focuses on the villagers' reactions to Kosmos, and his to them. His behaviour is child-like and bizarre. He shimmies up trees like a monkey, lives on sugar, tea and no apparent sleep and we're left wondering who or what he is (there's a bit of a similarity to a more eccentric Richard Hammond, but I'm sure that wasn't intentional).

The film adopts a philosophical air and probably has a lot to say in its elliptical way: for a start, there's

an ongoing comparison between man and animal. Kosmos and one of his women call out and move around each other like birds in a mating ritual, and there's more than a nod to Eisenstein's *Strike*, with repeated cross-cut shots of the bulging eyes of cattle before slaughter. Even images of geese paddling through slush appear to be significant, although who knows just what they mean? There are musings on life and death, and discussion as to whether man should spend his life seeking love or simply carrying on with the daily toil.

Cinematography and sound are beautiful and effective. Shots of the sky with speeded up clouds and the river making its way through snow-covered banks are enchanting, and a constant background of exploding shells and gunfire, the sound of wind and strange, atmospheric music transforms many scenes into something dark and foreboding.

It would perhaps have benefited from some judicious editing, as it feels slightly too long. And although for much of it we're left wondering what Erdem is actually getting at, I would recommend sticking with it to the end, as it's the kind of film where the imagery and ideas will linger in the brain long after it's been viewed.

Julie McNamee

Fortean Times Verdict

ODDLY HAUNTING FILM PERHAPS
OUTSTAYS ITS WELCOME

7

The Raven

Dir James McTeigue, US 2011
Universal Pictures UK, £14.99/£11.99

The mystery of Edgar Allen Poe's last days is given extremely speculative treatment in this reasonably gory thriller-cum-horror from director James McTeigue (*V for Vendetta*). It stars the ever-youthful John Cusack as a booze-guzzling braggart of a Poe, who we first meet as he recites his poetry to some 19th-century Baltimore tavern chavs. This pretty much sets the template for the whole film, which, for all its preposterous, overblown nature, manages to sustain the tension for most of its two hours' running time.

The film begins with Poe alone on a park bench in Baltimore, the worse for wear, staring vacantly at the sky. This much has some semblance of historical accuracy about it, Poe expiring soon after in reality in 1849, the cause of his death remaining a mystery. Track back in time four days: a fiendish murderer is abroad in Baltimore and proto-forensic detective Emmett Fields (Luke Evans) is having a hard time catching the culprit until he realises at a murder site that "this scene is familiar to me". That would be because Fields is a man who has read his Poe, and the killings mirror those found in some of Poe's classic tales, among them 'The Pit and the Pendulum' and 'The Cask of Amontillado'. Who better to aid him in his hunt than the writer of those stories himself? Poe's response is, well, po-faced

at first, to say the least; but when his sweetheart Emily (Alice Eve) becomes a target for the fiendish maniac, Poe is compelled to join the hunt.

The Raven is Grand Guignol for the masses, and great fun because of it. Screenwriters Ben Livingston and Hannah Shakespeare know when to rein in the wisecracks and let the unfolding horror come to the fore. One of the provisos for preventing another death is also the cure for Poe's writer's block: he must serialise the events as they happen in the daily newspaper. As his tormentor explains: "I used to live for your stories; when you stopped writing them I guess I went a bit nuts."

The cast do their best. Alice Eve has nothing much to do but play corseted damsel in distress, but she convinces you that you'd do all in your power to save her. Cusack looks (still) much too young to be the soul-weary, weathered, daguerreotyped Poe playing out his last days – but he manages to manifest the writer's growing torment enough to compensate. McTeigue's direction relies at times on breathless exposition and garbled explanation to gloss over shortfalls in the suspension of our disbelief, but there's more than enough nastiness to keep you guessing about the outcome right till the end.

If you revere Poe as a writer and are expecting an insightful biopic, stay away... for evermore! But *The Raven* doesn't commit the cardinal sin of failing to know itself, as so many films do: it's a fantasy horror outing, nothing more, with its severed tongue firmly in its cheek. With no pretensions otherwise and enough of the mysterious and the macabre to satisfy, it's at least bloody good fun.

Nick Ćirković

Fortean Times Verdict

POE FANS BEWARE – BUT THIS
IS STILL BLOODY GOOD FUN

7

Clone

Dir Benedek Fliegauf, Germany/Hungary/France 2010
Arrow Films, £12.99/£14.99

Despite the presence of *Doctor Who*'s Matt Smith and *Casino Royale*'s Eva Green, don't expect this to be a time travel-espionage mash-up. *Clone* (aka *Womb*) is, in fact, a very slow-moving, contemplative drama that deals with issues of

love, loss and reproduction in a way more reminiscent of science fiction literature than blockbuster movie-making.

The always-watchable Green is Rebecca, a scientist who reconnects with Thomas, her childhood sweetheart (Smith), only to lose him in a tragic car crash. In her grief, she has herself impregnated with his DNA, giving rise to a host of questions – is her son really her child or a reborn replacement lover?

Shot largely around a bleak north-German coastal area, and obviously a low-budget production, *Clone* looks different, but the turgid pacing (especially in the second half) and the failure to really get to grips with the issues it raises let the movie down somewhat. The acting is fine – it's largely a two-hander between Smith and Green – and the approach thoughtful, but the failure to come to any meaningful conclusion leads to disappointment in the end.

Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict

A BRAVE EFFORT THAT DOESN'T QUITE COME OFF

6

The Wicker Tree

Dir Robin Hardy, UK 2012
Anchor Bay, £19.99/£15.99

Perhaps we should simply pass this over in embarrassed silence, as watching *The Wicker Tree* is akin to finding your beloved, but clearly senile, grandma wandering the streets of Glasgow covered in wee and shouting obscenities at passers-by. Director Robin Hardy has (sort of) returned to the material of his cult favourite *The Wicker Man* with an unnecessary (sort of) sequel that achieves nothing of note, except, perhaps, forcing the viewer to question whether the original was really that good, and to conclude that, if it was, then thanks are due to writer Anthony Shaffer, the film's wonderful cast and a great soundtrack. This woeful effort – based on Hardy's own novel *Cowboys for Christ*, presumably tweaked to manufacture a *Wicker Man* connection, and populated by actors more usually glimpsed on *Casualty* or *The Bill* – sees two young American evangelicals

fooled into visiting a pagan community on the Scottish mainland where – well, I'm sure you can guess the rest and save yourself the boredom, mental anguish and sense of total betrayal engendered by sitting through this staggeringly awful abomination.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

SUMER IS ICUMEN IN... AND YOU'D BE ADVISED TO GO OUT

2

Shadow of the Sword

Dir Simon Aeby, US 2005
Universal Pictures UK, £14.99/£11.99

A timely re-release for this 2005 film perhaps, due to Nicolaj Coster-Waldau's recent rise in profile in *Game of Thrones* and *Headhunters*. Here we get a mixture of both, with this striking-looking film about two orphans separated at boyhood, one (Peter McDonald) to become a monk, the other (Waldau) a soldier and eventually a headsman on his return home in the midst of the Inquisition in 16th-century Europe.

The film offers some impressive settings, be they open landscapes or filthy streets, and populates them with an equally strong cast of actors – among them Steven Berkoff (a baddie Archbishop), Eddie Marsan and John Shrapnel. The love interest between Martin and Margaretha (Julie Cox), the incumbent headsman's daughter, is by no means an afterthought. They fall foul of the Church because of their associations with Anabaptists, and this ties in with the film's over-arching themes centred on religion and the right to personal belief. However, the central performances of Waldau and McDonald as friends whose loyalty is severely tested are hampered by a script which does little to cement their close bond at the outset or provide a strong enough sense of their diverging paths during their enforced separation for the viewer to invest in them emotionally. And the film's running time of under two hours simply doesn't allow *Shadow of the Sword* to become the epic it looks and feels like it should be.

Nick Ćirković

Fortean Times Verdict

NOT BAD, BUT NOT THE EPIC IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN

6

SHORTS

OUTPOST II: BLACK SUN

(Lionsgate Films, £19.99/£15.99)



You want to like *Outpost II: Black Sun*. After all, a low-budget British picture about an attractive young Nazi hunter (Catherine Steadman) who gets mixed up in the search for the notorious EMF weapon glimpsed in the original *Outpost* movie sounds like a decent enough proposition. Genuine ambition and surprisingly high production values, though, can't disguise the fact that the story itself is a confused and confusing mess. Whereas the first film was a squad-based horror film in the *Dog Soldiers*/*R-Point* mould – mercenaries are sent in to explore an old WWII bunker, where they discover Nazi zombies and dark secrets – this opens out and presents a Nazi conspiracy to... well, I was never quite sure what they wanted to do, but, being Nazis, we can assume it's pretty bad. I didn't understand who all the other people in the film were, or what they wanted to do, either. Typical of a movie that, for once, could have done with less action and more clunky exposition; a bit more work at the script stage would have saved it. **DS 5/10**

THE SQUAD

(Momentum Pictures Home Entertainment, £9.99)



We find more soldiers having a bad time, but to greater effect, in this relentlessly grim Colombian tale of men *in extremis*. When an ill-led and ill-assorted army squad gets stuck at a remote mountain base in guerrilla country, things quickly go from bad to much worse. In a sense, this is a slow-burning, psychological horror version of Carpenter's *The Thing*, with the shape-shifting horror fully interiorised and the paranoia brought into the very foreground – an idea underlined by the film's striking cinematography, in which the notably shallow depth of field mirrors the multiple protagonists' states of mind effectively reduces other people to hulking, shadowy blobs ("Who Goes There?" one thinks, harking even further back to Campbell's original story) and creates a pervasive sense of menace. Perhaps it piles on the misery and brutality a bit thick, but it does deliver its ambiguous horrors with gritty style. **DS 7/10**

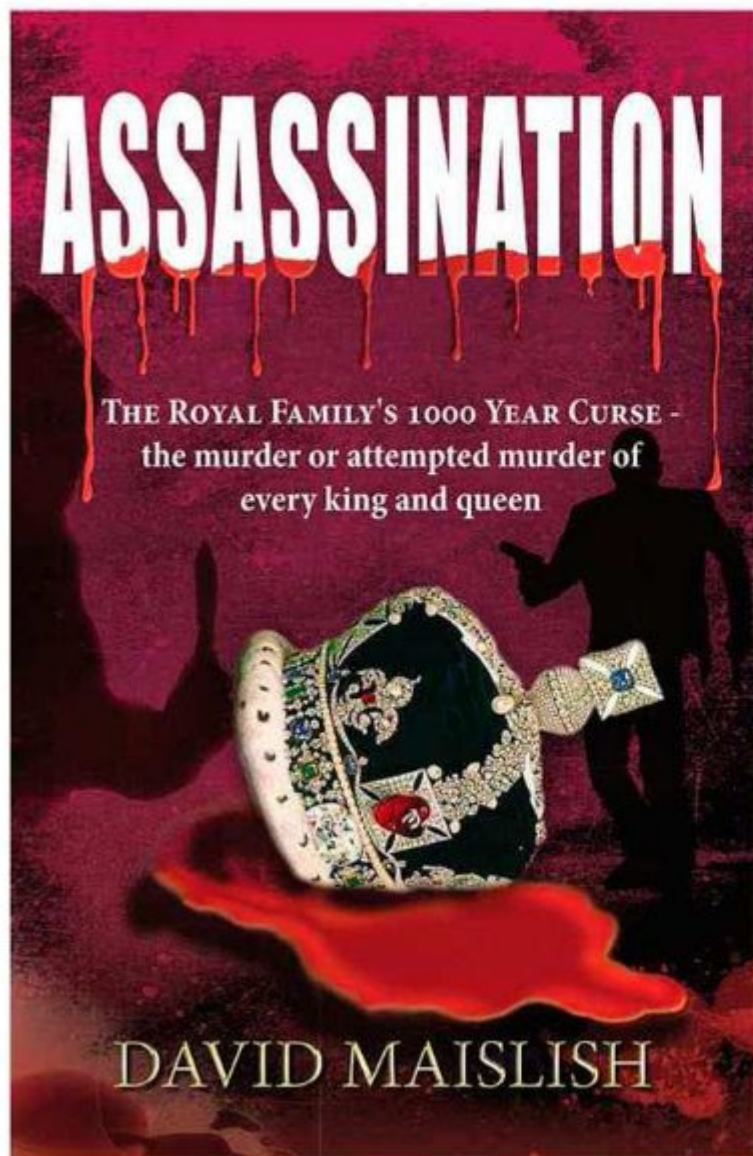
MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000: THE MOVIE

(MediumRare Entertainment, £15.99/£19.99)



In the not too distant future, a man and his robots are trapped on the Satellite of love, where evil scientists force them to sit through the worst movies ever made.

Starting in the late Eighties and lasting more than a decade and nearly 200 episodes, *Mystery Science Theater 3000* was a huge cult success. As cited above, the ludicrously simple premise meant the viewer watched old B-movies, filtered through the 'wit' of the three protagonists. Much as with a trip to the cinema itself, the odd overheard comment might amuse at first, but the viewing experience is ultimately ruined by the idiots in front who just won't stop talking. *MST3000: The Movie* (1996) is little more than a film for masochists who like to take their pleasure through gritted teeth. The films they watch aren't that bad; in this case *This Island Earth* which is really quite watchable and is a damn sight better without the moronic commentary. Think I'm being uncharitable? At a reunion, series stalwart Trace Beaulieu was asked what the worst film featured on *MST3K* was. His reply was: "*Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Movie*". **Tim Weinberg 2/10**



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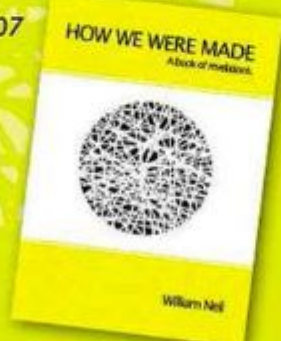
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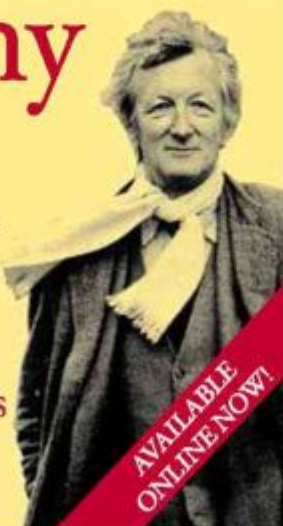
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Dear FT...

letters



Firestarters

I was struck by the difference between local reactions to the alleged fire starters in Catholic Italy ('Tales from the Vault', FT290:80) and Communist Vietnam ('Vietnamese fire-starter', FT290:20). The unfortunate Carole Compton ended up in an Italian prison accused of witchcraft, while a university has set up a special committee to study the 12-year-old girl involved in the Vietnamese case.

Guy Lyon Playfair
London

Voynich clue

Georgina Skipper provided a screenshot from Great British Ghosts No.6, which features a black-and-white "horoscope" written in Voynich script [FT289:70]. Disappointingly, this isn't a new clue that will help with the dating or deciphering of the Voynich Manuscript, as she hopes, because it's just a page from the original Voynich, Folio 70.

Interested readers can examine the same page in colour by downloading the Voynich pdf from <http://bit.ly/a3sWYm> (archive.org) and scrolling to page 128.

Grant Hutchison
Dundee, Tay

Editor's note: Thanks to John Baker, who made the same point, directing us to <http://bit.ly/Mn56Q5> (beinecke.library.yale.edu).

Saint or sinner?

I was entertained by a minor synchronicity in FT288, in which we were presented not only with Fluckinger's examination of the allegedly carnivorous undead ('Vampire Autopsies', p.44) but also a fleeting reference to the "incorruptible bodies signifying sainthood" (review of *Digging up the Dead*, p.61).

While lividity in the grave must be a difficult field of study to pursue, it is clear that the interpretation of such phenomena might depend largely upon social context. Modern-day recreational neck-suckers ('Creatures of the Night', p.40) therefore have good cause to

remain sanguine, for the route to beatification or enstakement may be an ambivalent one.

Dr Ian Mitchell
By email

Olympic mascots

Many thanks for the survey of conspiracy theories surrounding the 2012 Olympic Games, particularly concerning the distinctly odd one-eyed mascots, Wenlock and Mandeville [FT290:14-15]. Perhaps the duo are indeed meant to soften us up for alien or Illuminati takeover, but I stumbled on a YouTube video suggesting an alternative. Nathan Bell, who has compiled films based on the existence of subliminal sex-and-death 'embeds' in advertising (www.losttreasuresonline.com/), also posted "Olympic 2012 Mascots Are Subliminal Penises" (<http://bit.ly/LGHqbq>), observing "there are two" with "a rainbow behind them" and quoting Boris Johnson on the "solid coalition". We can only speculate on the deeper purpose of such "mind control", but if a man finds his sexuality drifting during the festival of running up and down, he will know who to blame.

Cedric Knight
London, perilously close to the stadium

More oxygen?

Interesting though it is, the reduced gravity theory for the prehistoric Earth isn't the only explanation as to why dragonflies appeared with enormous 18in (46cm) wingspans during the Carboniferous period 300 million years ago [FT287:62]. It's more likely that at that time the land was rapidly colonised by woody plants, especially primitive trees, and the atmosphere was steadily enriched with molecular oxygen as a bi-product of photosynthesis from the explosion of land plant growth to such an extent that it reached a level of 30 per cent (almost 10 per cent higher than present-day levels). This was enough to overcome the size limitation imposed upon insects due to diffusion of oxygen into their tissues for respiration (insects 'breathe' by diffusion of oxygen through small

Simulacra Corner



Martin Hobbs took this photo of a rather menacing "walking tree" in Brocton Coppice, Cannock Chase, Staffordshire.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any

curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – please tell us your postal address and we'll send you an exclusive Fortean Times gift.

tubes – called 'spiracles' – in their abdomens that open to the atmosphere) and explains why on our present-day Earth, insects are comparatively small, whereas in the Carboniferous world the 30 per cent oxygen level allowed dragonflies to grow much larger. But why it was in the geologically more recent age of the dinosaurs, super-heavy pterosaurs could

even get off the ground, *Archæopteryx* still managed to glide about despite inefficient wings and Brachiosaurs grew so large and strode around without breaking most of the bones in their bodies under their own weight remains a real mystery and certainly is an argument for reduced gravity.

Mike Fryer
Colchester, Essex



Beyond culture shock

I was pleased to see Dr Edward Dutton's article "Going Native" [FT289:44-49]. The paranormal experiences of anthropologists in the field are a particularly rich source of information on the nature of the anomalous, elucidating the social, cultural, physiological, psychological and emotional conditions that give rise to paranormal experiences.

Nevertheless, I feel the need to question Dr Dutton's use of the concept of 'culture shock' as a full explanation for the anomalous experiences recounted by anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski, EE Evans-Pritchard and Edith Turner. The problem lies in the fact that the experiences reported by these anthropologists matched the beliefs and experiences of the natives of

the culture they were inhabiting. Evans-Pritchard, for example, described how his experience of an anomalous light in the Sudanese bush "accorded well with Zande beliefs about witchcraft" and that his informants immediately recognised the light as witchcraft when he described it to them. How, then, can the concept of 'culture shock' apply when these are precisely the kinds of experience reported by those who are native to that culture?

I think Dr Dutton has missed the point of what these anthropologists are attempting to convey when they write about their anomalous field experiences. For Edith Turner, to experience the extraction of a malignant spirit during a healing ceremony was to enter completely into another culture, if only for a moment, to "see what the Native sees", without attempting to rationalise such experiences in terms of what our own culture deems acceptable. Turner asks us to take such experiences seriously, and to treat the belief systems of others with respect. While I do not doubt that 'culture shock' may play a role in initiating the anomalous experiences of

anthropologists, I cannot accept it is as a complete explanation because it ignores the embeddedness of such experiences within many of the world's cultures.

Jack Hunter

Department of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Bristol

Editor's note: Mr Hunter is the founder and editor of the free online journal Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal (www.paranthropology.co.uk).

I've noticed that the principle of parsimony, or Ockham's Razor, gets bandied about rather a lot, and rather loosely, in the pages of FT. A recent, and revealing, example is provided by Dr Edward Dutton in his article "Going Native", in which he recounts the paranormal experience of Victor and Edith Turner, Edith describing seeing an emanation from the body of a Ndembu, Chihamba cult member during a healing ritual. Says Dutton, "The Turners' experience is... parsimoniously explained by their experiencing culture shock and the strong

emotion induced by healing rituals, which involve high levels of adrenaline, making people more suggestible."

'Parsimonious'? – I can count at least four levels of saving hypothesis in there! A more parsimonious explanation would be that healing rituals can generate healing energies, which can manifest visually (and which, possibly not being reproducible under controlled conditions, are possibly not amenable to scientific investigation). Anyone wishing to invoke parsimony in favour of their beliefs would do well to read Dieter Gernert's 'Ockam's razor and its improper use' (*Journal of Scientific Exploration* 2007, 21:135-140) in which is stated: "What is compatible with somebody's own pre-existing world-view, will be considered simple, clear, logical, and evident, whereas what is contradicting that world-view will quickly be rejected as an unnecessarily complex explanation and a senseless additional hypothesis. In this way, the principle of simplicity becomes a mirror of prejudice..."

Ian Godsland

Slapton, Bedfordshire

Sperm Hunters

Regarding "Sperm Hunters" [FT289:5]: are the social conditioning or testosterone levels in Zimbabwe markedly different from our own? Kidnapping, drugging and forcing male hitchhikers to have sex with prostitutes at gun/knife-point, or supplying young men with new clothes, alcohol and prostitutes, or paying £250, all just to obtain a used condom? That seems such a lot of trouble and expense to go to. Any business-minded witch or prostitute would be far better off coming over to Britain and holding up a banner saying "free sex" on a university or college campus, a night out in town, at a football match, or even door-to-door cold-calling (that would make a refreshing change to the usual proposition of double-glazing). I'm fairly certain they'd be able to collect more used condoms than they could carry in a very short time, and without any

other elaborate or illegal forms of persuasion! If this truly is an emerging, growth industry, maybe this would make a good episode of *The Apprentice*, seeing which candidates can acquire and sell this newly lucrative product the most effectively.

Alternatively, I wonder how many entrepreneurial university students, having seen your article about young males being drugged, plied with alcohol, and offered a pick of women, will now be looking to take a year out hitchhiking around Zimbabwe, and hoping to trade their very own raw commodity.

- Just speculating on the appearance of Henry Brown's potato plant with the 'potatoes' growing on the plant stems above ground [FT288:12]. It's difficult to tell from the photograph alone, but I think the growths on the stems could be plant galls, an abnormal growth on a plant caused by an invading organism

(typically an insect, other invertebrate, fungus, bacterium or virus) using the plant as a host for shelter and nutrients. Cutting one of them in half might have revealed plant material quite different from that of a potato.

Alec Barney Page

Chellaston, Derby

Here be dragons

According to <http://bit.ly/MV1sPp> (mappingthefuturewhereareyou.wordpress.com), Wikipedia and other easily searched online sources, "'Hic Dracones' – here be dragons – or more accurately 'HC SVNT DRACONES' – can be found inscribed on what is now Indonesia, near the current location of the Komodo dragons, on the Hunt-Lenox Globe, a 13cm (5in) copper globe dating from c.1503-07 currently in the collection of the New York Public Library. Strangely enough, neither 'HC SVNT DRACONES' nor 'Hic Dracones' has

been found on any other mediaeval map." However, "Hic sunt leones" (Here be lions) was used to mark *terra incognita* on classical maps.

Chester B Powers

Via email

Brainwashed

Re "Wired for God" [FT286:42-47, 287:38-43], and investigations into the causes of what might be called the "religious experience": I would hazard that very few people who profess to be religious would claim to have had such an experience. I would suggest that the most common reason people are religious is not because they've experienced something transformational or inexplicable, but simply and mundanely because they've been brainwashed from an early age. Religiosity, by and large, needs no explanation outside of cultural entrainment.

Rian Hughes

Kew Gardens, London

The Ogo-Pogo Fox-Trot

Those searching for the elusive Ogo-pogo reported to live in Okanagan Lake, British Columbia [FT46:48–50, 211:52–58] might be interested in a recent sighting (well... hearing, actually) I made of him via a local car boot sale. Fans of Ogo-pogo will know that the Canadian monster is named after a 1924 music-hall song, played and recorded by the Savoy Havana Band, a racy popular British combo of the time. Paul Whiteman recorded the same tune with an Americanised lyric for the Victor company. The song was “The Ogo-Pogo: The Funny Fox-Trot”, composed by Mark Strong, with words by Cumberland Clark, the literary critic and comic poet. Strong, with other writers, composed “I’m getting better every day”, a doleful song about the inevitability of death, and “I want to go to Margate”. You can make your own jokes up there, if you wish.

Well, at the car boot sale I found another version of “The Ogo-Pogo”, with a mysterious connection to a well-known PC retailer. On the Curry’s ‘Westport’ label, it’s a fine rendition with the full lyric [see below]. No artist credit is given, but (and here is where it gets even more mysterious) careful inspection reveals that the Curry’s label is actually pasted over another one, a British ‘Imperial’. Apparently, Curry’s used to do that sort of thing in their early days when they sold gramophones and bicycles. ‘Imperial’ gave the performer as “George Berry”, but this is another enigma wrapped in a how’s-your-father. Berry is a pseudonym of Harry Fay, who made hundreds of records for dozens of early gramophone companies under many names. YouTube offers at least two versions of “The Ogo-Pogo”. One is Whiteman’s, another is by The Swanee Syncopaters. To my ears neither is remotely as good as



the Berry/Fay version which dates from September 1924.

Robert Cox
Westleton, Suffolk

Editor’s note: You can access Paul Whiteman’s version of “The Ogo-Pogo” song at: <http://bit.ly/Nf7acW> (YouTube).

Here are the two opening verses of Clark’s original lyrics:

“One fine day in Hindustan, / I met a funny little man / With googly eyes and lantern jaws, / A new silk hat and some old plus-fours. / When I said to that quaint old

chap: / ‘Why do you carry that big steel trap, / That butterfly net and that rusty gun?’ / He replied ‘Listen here my son:

“I’m looking for the Ogo-pogo, / The funny little Ogo-pogo. / His mother was an earwig, his father was a whale, / I’m going to put a little bit of salt on his tail. / I want to find the Ogo-pogo / While he’s playing on his old banjo. / The Lord Mayor of London, / The Lord Mayor of London, / The Lord Mayor of London wants to put him in the Lord Mayor’s show”. [Cr: Dr Karl Shuker]

White River Monster

One of my favourite cryptozoological wonders is the ‘White River Monster’ sighted from 1915 through the 1970s in the White River of northeastern Arkansas. Accounts of this beast in cryptozoological literature cite biologist Roy P Mackal’s theory that ‘Whitey’ is (or was) a displaced male elephant seal (*Mirounga angustirostris*) that wandered up the mouth of the Mississippi River and made a left turn to the White River. For an elephant seal to wander up the Mississippi means it would have had to have swum through the Panama Canal [only opened in 1914], since elephant seals are found in the Pacific Ocean. Those that live in the South Atlantic are found on islands near the tip of South America, so it would have had to swim the length of the entire continent of South

America and enter the Caribbean before finding its way to the Gulf.

The Florida manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) is a more likely candidate, having been known to stray as far west in the Gulf of Mexico as Texas. An account of a sighting of the White River Monster in Jerome Clark’s *Unexplained* quoted the observer as saying: “It looked as if the thing was peeling all over” and describing the sound it was making as a “combination of a cow’s moo” – one of the reasons the sluggish, slow-moving mammal is called a ‘sea cow’. And since manatees are frequently encountered by boaters in Florida waters they often display a peeling back when they surface, the result of boat propeller scars.

I am amazed no one has suggested the manatee as the solution to the White River Monster mystery. YouTube (in collaboration with MonsterQuest) have given plenty of space to videos of ‘Florida river monsters’ that are nothing more than manatees.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Cosmic mysteries

I’d like to correct certain inaccurate statements made by Steven Daly [FT288:72–73]. Firstly, he states: “Current theories explain the Universe (not all of it, naturally) to a fantastic degree of accuracy.” They don’t. A massive 96 per cent of the bit of the Universe we can see is still undetected and unexplained. Of this, roughly 72 per cent is dark energy, which may – or may not – have something to do with the accelerating expansion of the Universe. The remaining 24 per cent is dark matter, which may – or may not – have something to do with keeping the fast-moving stars at the extremities of galactic discs in orbit around their galactic nuclei and preventing them from flying off into space.

Secondly, he seems to think that changes in the speed of light are related to changes in the positions of spectral lines. They aren’t. It’s changes

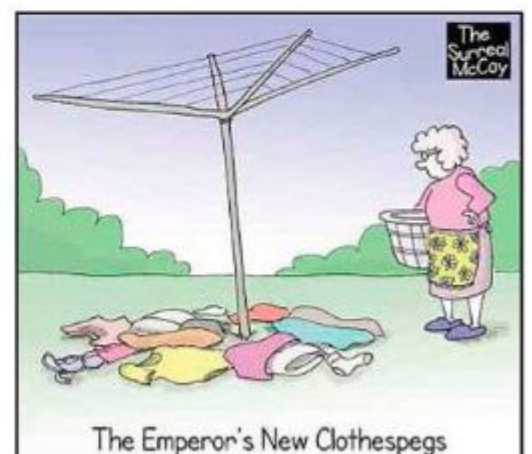
of wavelength that affect their positions; shifting emissions and the spectral lines in them either towards the red end of the spectrum (redshifts), or towards the blue end of the spectrum (blueshifts). Most people think that these shifts are caused by the Doppler effects of relative motion, because it’s certainly true that relatively close receding or approaching objects exhibit redshifts or blueshifts respectively.

Thirdly, he cites Hubble’s discovery of universal expansion as an example of evidence for the Big Bang. He could not have picked a worse example, since it can easily be shown to be a fallacy, as follows.

Before 1929, it was noticed that the farthest galaxies tend to be dimmer and more redshifted than closer ones. Hubble thought that, due to Doppler effects, this meant they were accelerating away from us (and from each other); so the greater their redshifts, then the further away they are and the faster they must be receding. Hence, after only a relatively short time, those distant galaxies should be even dimmer and have even greater redshifts.

But this is not the case. Most of the farthest galaxies discovered over three quarters of a century ago still have roughly the same brightnesses and redshifts. Therefore Doppler effects cannot be the primary cause of the high redshifts of distant objects; the Universe cannot be expanding after all; and all the objects in it could not possibly have originated from the same tiny region of space in a Big Bang some 13.7 billion years ago.

Ian H Machell
Staverton, Wiltshire



it happened to me...

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com



ETIENNE GILLILAN

Daniel's death

Back in the early Eighties, shortly after I entered adolescence, I had a rather strange dream. At junior school I knew a boy named Daniel [surname on file]. We were never particularly close, and our friendship was, at best, an on-and-off affair. He had his chums and I had mine. I lived in Kent at the time, and, as I passed the 11-plus exam and he failed, we went to different senior schools and I rarely saw him.

A year or so after our paths had diverged, I went to bed, promptly fell asleep and started to dream. It was a lovely sunny day and I was sitting on a beach, watching a large number of people playing in the sea. Even though I loved swimming, I felt a tangible dread. Everyone was calling me, beseeching me to come and join them, reassuring me that it was perfectly safe and that there was nothing to worry about. Their cajoling proved effective and I eventually entered the water. Despite my trepidation, nothing happened and I started to relax.

Suddenly, my companions started to panic and desperately tried to get out of the water. I remained, dispassionately observing them as they scrambled onto the beach. Soon I was alone in the sea, a solitary figure standing in the surf, gazing inquisitively

Everywhere was uniform and monochrome – a dead place, bereft of life, even time

at them, wondering why they had so abruptly fled. I was obviously in some danger, as everyone was frantically imploring me to get out of the water, and judging from their gestures, the threat was behind me, out to sea. Strangely, rather than panicking, I calmly started to turn so I could see what had induced such terror in them.

Before I had managed to complete this simple movement, a truly gargantuan wave was upon me, engulfing me before I could even comprehend its enormity, washing me off my feet and submerging me in its darkest depths. I cannot say how long my fragile frame was dragged along by this behemoth, but eventually I was able to struggle to the surface. Looking around, I was shocked to find that the wave had washed the entire world away. I was standing knee-deep in cold grey water, beneath a foreboding, overcast sky. Everything was gone, not only the land and the people, but also

sound and colour. Everywhere was uniform and monochrome – a dead place, bereft of life, even time.

I am unsure how long I stood there. I don't think I walked around, but I became aware that someone behind me was calling my name repeatedly, and I turned to see who it was. Daniel was standing there, not too far away but certainly not close. There was a definite distance between us; two separate entities, alone in a desolate place.

I stood watching him. He was imploring me to join him, stating that he was scared to continue on his own. He didn't say where he was going. Even though he was more than familiar to me, I was overwhelmed by complete and utter dread and refused. I am not sure if I actually articulated this, and cannot say definitively that we actually conversed, or how long we stood facing each other: it could have been seconds, minutes or hours. It was at this point that I awoke, terrified and screaming.

I had this dream on the Friday night, and didn't give it much thought once I was awake. My neighbours at the time were racquet sport fanatics, and every week I accompanied them, and their children, Terry (who was a couple of years older than me) and Suzanne (who was two or three years younger than me), to Finsbury Badminton Club. When Terry

popped over on the Sunday to tell me they were leaving, he had some sensational news to share. We went to different schools and he assumed, rightly, that I wouldn't be aware of the extraordinary events that had occurred on Friday.

He started by asking me if I knew Daniel. When I said yes, he told me that he was dead. In PE, Daniel had been playing pirates, a popular game that involved the pupils moving around the gym from apparatus to apparatus; if your feet touched the floor, you were out. During the game, Daniel slipped off a piece of gym equipment, fell backwards onto a crash-mat and swallowed his tongue. He was known as a joker, and initially the PE teacher believed he was only pretending to be injured. When Daniel began to turn blue, he realised something was terribly wrong and an ambulance was called. While he waited for it to arrive, the teacher performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, which failed to work, although on his way to hospital the ambulance crew had managed to revive him momentarily, but he was dead on arrival at the hospital.

Terry was repeating a story that he had heard after who knows how many retellings and elaborations. I don't believe the teacher initially thought it was a joke, or that Daniel was brought back to life in the ambulance, for the simple reason that the pupils would not have known this had occurred. I have subsequently heard from a mutual friend that he didn't swallow his tongue, but had a hole in the heart, but again this is hearsay and I have no way of finding out the truth. What is significant is that he died on the Friday and that night I dreamt about him. I am sceptical about the paranormal, and I believe that there is a rational explanation for what I experienced. Did I, either consciously or subconsciously, hear someone (probably my parents) discussing what had happened, which then inspired the dream?

Some people may believe that Daniel was afraid to continue his journey after he had died, and was reaching out for someone to help him. Yet, as I previously mentioned, we had never been particularly close, and had rarely seen each other for many months prior

to his unfortunate death, so I do not see why he would have contacted me. Of course I may have a particular psychic resonance that he was able to tune into, but if I do it has never bothered me subsequently. Also, as I was alive I don't know what I could have done to help. Maybe if I had followed him I too would have died.

The hall where we played badminton was on a rather desolate stretch of road that ended in an impressively foreboding church, perched atop a crumbling cliff, with a suitably creepy graveyard, and this was where Daniel was laid to rest. Whenever I could slip away from hitting a shuttlecock over a net, I would visit his grave in the hope that it would precipitate another eerie incident, but it never did.

Stephen Watt
Hartlepool, Cleveland

Inner voices

Like Carly Stevens [FT290:72], I occasionally have heard 'inner voices' like the ones she describes. I only experience this when sitting at a computer, usually playing solitaire or some game that makes me stretch my mind a little. I never hear conversations; what I always hear is snippets of random speech, always in strong regional accents but never in my own Swansea accent. The voices are never 'mocking' me but are truly random. I will hear things like "Cheese on toast?" "And the dog", "Feeling that way" and "Tea, nice". I take these from a list I wrote once after hearing the voices. It happened to me first during a spell of ill health, so I put it down to stress or being unwell, but I still get it on the rare occasion. I feel it is a phenomenon akin to being in a hypnagogic state, falling almost asleep, almost being brainwashed by the repetitiveness of playing solitaire.

Laurence Haynes
Swansea, West Glamorgan

Like Carly, I too have had heard 'inner voices' from a young age. I can never understand what the chattering voices are saying but they tend to be repetitive, start gently and gradually get louder and more irate then back to

gentle again. I am aware of muffled surroundings; I can also get a euphoric feeling. It is as if I am in a bubble but then snap out of it. When I was younger, this would just happen at random. Now I am older it will only happen if I clear my mind and stare into space for a while or I am deep in thought and puzzling over a problem. I can snap out of it at any time I choose. It feels very strange.

Ray —
By email

Carly asks if anyone else has experienced something similar to her 'inner voices'. I believe I have.

I work in a farm office in the middle of the countryside, and, when working alone, I'm occasionally aware of very quiet, distant music, but I know that there could be no source close enough for me to hear. As soon as anything gets my attention, the music stops. It took me a few times to identify it. It was so quiet that I was picking up on a very slight noise from the computer workings and was simply interpreting it as music. As I moved my head closer to the box it was more obviously a mild whirr but as I drew away the noise slowly blurred into music, especially if I went into that slight trance-like state you go into, for example, when trying to pick out 3D pictures (stereograms?). Perhaps Carly was interpreting a similar sound as chat; she does say it occurs more when sitting at a computer or watching TV.

Katy Giffin
By email

School witch

When I was at primary school in Nottinghamshire in the 1970s, I had a teacher who left an impression more vivid than most. It was a very small school with only two classes and this teacher, a young woman, came in to take charge of the lower class, which included me. The first thing she did was to tell us that our soft toys came alive in our bedrooms at night when we were sleeping, and they played and danced around our sleeping selves. We didn't believe her straight away but she was quite adamant this was true and there was quite a serious discussion about it that

left one or two of the kids quite awestruck. Not much noteworthy about that, but this teacher definitely had something slightly spooky about her (besides always wearing head-to-toe black, as I recall) that filtered back to parents and gave at least one of my friends nightmares.

Her big impression came at Christmas time. Word went round beforehand that this teacher had something planned for the party. There was a partition between the classrooms that was opened up after lunch one day, and the entire school of about 30 sat on chairs arranged around the edge of the rooms. 'Miss X' sat on the edge of the circle where the classrooms met while the headmaster handed her a long pole that was used to open the catches on upper windows with a brass hook at one end. All the curtains were drawn shut so the room was dim. The headmaster said that she was going to 'catch' spirits. Holding the pole at one end with both hands, she closed her eyes and went into a trance, then started slowly whirling the pole around, calling out to the spirits she was evidently trying to reach. As her 'performance' intensified, the pole hook was smashed against the floor on each quickening rotation, Miss X shouting and working up into a frenzy, seated all the while.

This scene of her, with her splayed legs covered by an ankle-length black skirt, rolling her head and calling out as the pole's hooked end smashed against the floorboards is seared into my memory. Of course the kids – and probably the other teachers – had never seen anything like this before, and I can definitely say that I haven't seen anything like it since! The kids were pretty shocked by what was going on, some might have cried, so after no more than a minute of this the headmaster stepped in. The pole was taken from Miss X, the curtains were drawn back, normal festive games resumed.

Unsurprisingly, there was a parental fuss over the episode. Miss X left very soon after and things returned to normal, until the school closed within a few months and subsequently became a tearoom. I went there for lunch

recently, and while finding the same floorboards on which our witch teacher smashed her 'spirit hook', I wondered what inspired her to do such a thing and what became of her.

Jerry Glover
Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire

Phantom nun

At 11 o'clock one hot summer morning in the school holidays, my two young children and I left the house to go shopping. As we went out of the front door, a nun in full-flowing blue habit strode very purposefully along the pavement from the left. I didn't think this was unusual, as I had been brought up in the same road as a convent and frequently walked behind nuns. We followed behind her and she turned right just before we did. Our garage was situated behind our house, down a fenced alleyway between the back gardens. As we got to the alleyway, the end garden fence corner was angled off and the nun went and stood there, facing us. I said "Good morning" as we passed her, less than an arm's length away. She was looking down and I couldn't see her eyes. She also appeared very pale and greyish, but I put this down to living inside a convent. She seemed to me to have an Irish look about her. Her lips were quite thin with a Mona Lisa smile on them, and I noticed a lock of very curly salt-and-pepper-coloured hair showing at her temple under her wimple. We got the car out and drove round a minute later, but she was gone.

It wasn't until the next day that I wondered where she had gone to, knowing that all the neighbours were out at work. But more to the point, where had she come from? Then it occurred to me that nuns now wear cardigans, pencil skirts and Alice-bands, while this nun was dressed in 1950s/60s clothes. I wish I had realised at the time and had shaken her hand – or tried to. I didn't tell my children my suspicions about this spectre in case they ever saw her outside the house again, as I didn't want them to be frightened; but we didn't see her again.

Linda Cutbill
Yateley, Hampshire

FORTEAN TRAVELLER



81. Wilhelmshöhe Park, Kassel

GARY LACHMAN travels to Kassel, Germany, in search of modern-day Rosicrucians and an esoteric legacy expressed in water and stone.

In 1614, a pamphlet entitled *Fama Fraternitatis*, or “The Fame of the Fraternity”, appeared in the German city of Kassel, announcing the existence of an enigmatic secret society known as the Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross. Its members, known as Rosicrucians, claimed to be the followers of the mysterious Christian Rosenkreuz, a seeker of esoteric knowledge who travelled in the holy lands and mystic East in search of spiritual wisdom, and who died in 1484 at the ripe age of 106. For more than a century, Rosenkreuz’s tomb lay unknown, until it was uncovered by the pamphlet’s authors. Within a hidden subterranean heptagonal vault, illuminated by a “miniature sun”, they found his uncorrupted body amidst a treasure of hermetic, alchemical, and astrological works. Inspired by this remarkable find, the brethren devoted themselves to carrying on Rosenkreuz’s mission of spreading spiritual wisdom, and called for a “universal Reformation” of Christendom, heralding a new age of religious, political, social, and scientific progress, freed from the repressive domination of the Catholic Church and the Habsburg regime.

The authors of the *Fama*, and of the manifestos that followed (the *Confessio Fraternitas* and the surreal *Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz*) encouraged their readers to seek them out and join them in their great work. Many indeed heard the call and tried to find the brothers. But no matter where they looked, the Rosicrucians could not be found. Even the philosopher Descartes, no slouch at making discoveries, failed to track down the mysterious brethren; search as he might, they remained unknown. So well hidden were the Rosy Brothers that they soon acquired a nickname – “the Invisibles”. For most, this meant that they didn’t exist and were obviously a hoax. Others, however, believed



they had decamped to Tibet, while still others argued that the Invisibles revealed themselves only to the worthy. To this day, exactly who or what the original Rosicrucians were remains a mystery, although the work of Dame Frances Yates, Christopher McIntosh and others has shed much light on it. Like the Knights Templar, they serve as a handy peg on which quite a few theorists have hung more than one ‘secret history’.

While in no way implying that I am worthier than Descartes, during a

ABOVE: The pamphlet that started it all – the *Fama Fraternitas* announced the discovery of the grave of Christian Rosenkreuz and the existence of the ‘Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross’.

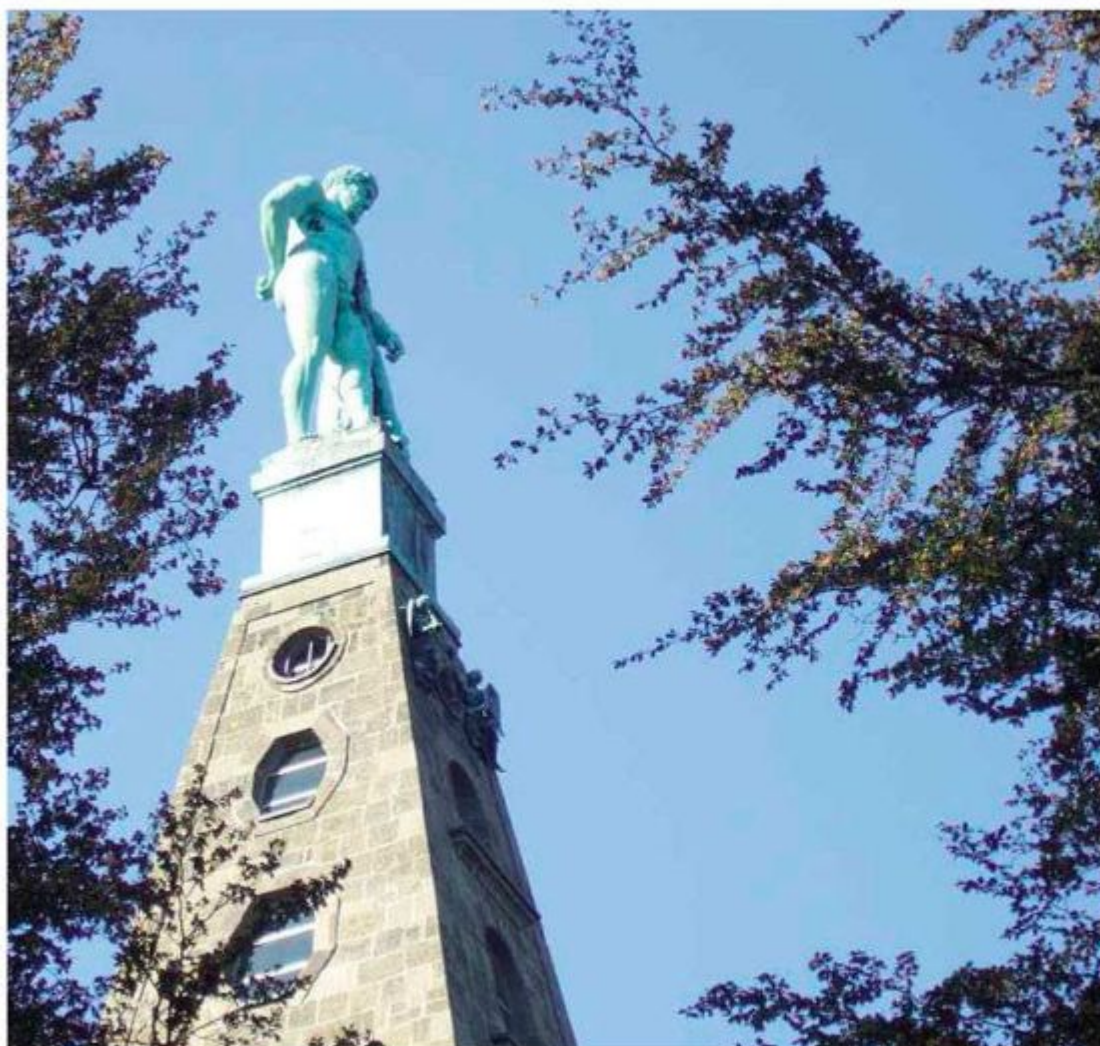
recent journey to Kassel I had no difficulty at all in meeting Rosicrucians. One of them, in fact, met me at the airport in Hanover – and very kindly drove me through the beautiful German countryside as we made our way to the site of the original Rosicrucians’ appearance – or non-appearance, as the case may be.

Last year, I was invited by the *Stiftung Rosenkreuz* (Rosicrucian Foundation) to take part in a panel discussion following a showing at Kassel’s *Kulturbahnhof* (a renovated train station) of *Nachtmeerfahrten* (“Night Sea Journey”), a film by the Berlin filmmaker Rüdiger Sünner about the life and work of CG Jung. Sünner had read my book *Jung the Mystic*, and had interviewed me for his film, suggesting that I join him and the Swiss psychologist Hanni Studer in a discussion about Jung’s work. The *Stiftung Rosenkreuz*, which was organising the event, agreed, and in early October 2011 I made my way to Kassel.

You might wonder what a 20th-century Swiss psychologist has to do with a 17th-century German secret society; but more than anyone else, Jung (the 50th anniversary of whose death in 1961 was marked by the conference) made esoteric spirituality respectable again in the modern West; and he and the early Rosicrucians shared common ground in their deep interest in alchemy and the esoteric side of Christianity. The *Stiftung Rosenkreuz*’s aim is to “further Hermetic and Gnostic thought”, something Jung himself did much towards, making a link between the two quite natural.

During our ride from Hanover to Kassel, my Rosicrucian friend told me something about his group’s history. The *Stiftung Rosenkreuz* evolved out of the work of Jan van Rijckenborg, a Dutch writer who founded the *Lectorium Rosicrucianum* in Amsterdam after World War II. Rijckenborg followed the work of Jacob Boehme, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, and Max Heindel. Heindel was a student of Steiner who broke away (Steiner at one point claimed he plagiarised his work) and started his own school, the Rosicrucian Foundation, in San Diego, California. His Rosicrucian temple, Mount Ecclesia, remains there today, a site on the US National Register of Historic Places. California also claims the Ancient Mystical Order Rosæ Crucis, otherwise known as AMORC, whose Egyptian-style headquarters is located in San Jose. Readers of a certain age may remember the AMORC advertisements on the backs of comic books, promising the reader the secrets of the Universe if they only cut out the coupon and sent it in. At around the age of 12, I did – but never received the book. Certainly at that point, for me at least, the Rosicrucians remained invisible.

Other names associated with Kassel



Kassel does seem to have a magical character

ABOVE: The Hercules Octagon rises over the fantastic Wilhelmshöhe Park.

Charles I, Landgrave of Hesse-Kassel, and in its early years it was known as *Karlsberg*. The Landgrave was a great patron of the arts and sciences, and had an interest in mechanical marvels. At one point, he was the patron of Johann Bessler, otherwise known as Orffyreus, who claimed to have invented a perpetual motion machine (FT218:58–59). Bessler's device was examined by the philosopher Leibniz, who declared it authentic (like Descartes, Leibniz also sought out the Rosicrucians but couldn't find them). The Dutch mathematician Willem's Gravesande (*sic*) also investigated it and believed it was real. Alas, Bessler seems to have been a paranoid sort, and when he saw 's Gravesande examining his device he believed the Dutchman was trying to steal its secrets, and so destroyed it. This ruined the £20,000 deal the Rosicrucian-inspired Royal Society was considering to acquire the machine. Bessler was supposed to have built another one, but no one seems to have seen it. He died in 1745 from a fall while constructing a windmill.

The last addition to the park came in 1826, when Wilhelm II, the Elector of Hesse, ordered construction of the *grosser Wasserfall*, an artificial 'great Waterfall'. Prior to this, a number of follies had been added. There's a *faux* ruined Roman aqueduct, from which a waterfall plummets some 34m (112ft) to the rocks below. Another waterfall crashes beneath the *Teufelsbrücke*, or 'Devil's Bridge'. There's also the *Höllenteich* or 'Hell's Pond', and the fake ruins of the *Löwenburg* or 'Lion's Castle', as well as the Steinhoffer Falls, an artificial construction that exemplifies the early Romantic fascination with man-made 'natural' landscapes.

But the centrepiece of this remarkable landscape, dominating the Kassel Valley for three centuries, is the towering Hercules Octagon, the source of one of Europe's most spectacular water works. Begun in 1701 by the Roman architect Giovanni Francesco Guarniero, the Octagon, a cyclopean structure built to look as if it accommodated giants, rises some 33m (108ft). In 1713, this was topped by a 30m (100ft) pyramid, on which stands a nearly 9m (30ft)-tall replica of the Farnese Hercules, a famous statue owned by the prestigious Farnese family of Rome (itself an ancient copy of the bronze original, made in 320 BC by Lysippos, Alexander the Great's favourite sculptor). The whole 72m (235ft)-tall ensemble is situated at the highest location in the park, and can be seen for miles around. From it, you have a panoramic view of Kassel and its environs, although getting to it is something of a Herculean labour in itself. Hercules is supposed to represent the aid that the Landgrave had given the Habsburg Emperor Charles VI in the Spanish War of Succession: just as the gods couldn't defeat the Titans without Hercules's help, so too the

are the Brothers Grimm, who lived there and who collected many of their tales from the area, and the filmmaker FW Murnau, who was born there and whose *Nosferatu* started the cinema vampire vogue. On a more esoteric note, Kassel was visited by Dr John Dee, on his journey home from Prague in 1589, after his time with the hermetic Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II (see FT290:74–76). According to Frances Yates, Dee was visited in Bremen by the hermetic philosopher Heinrich Khunrath. Dee's ideas influenced Khunrath, whose own work is a strong influence on the Rosicrucian manifestos. Dee's hand is clearly seen in the *Chemical Wedding*, whose title page carries an image of Dee's *Monas hieroglyphica*, a strange occult symbol that encapsulates Dee's mystical philosophy. And the *Confessio Fraternitas* includes an extended discussion of Dee's symbol, referred to as a "More Secret Philosophy". Other Anglo-Rosicrucian connections are with Robert Fludd, who wrote extensive defences of the Brotherhood when their reputation hit a low point; Elias Ashmole, who made English translations of the manifestos and tried to join the Brotherhood; and the Royal Society, of which Ashmole was a member and which, in its early form, was profoundly influenced by Rosicrucian ideals.

But while Dee's ideas may have sparked what Frances Yates called "the Rosicrucian Enlightenment", one wonders why they picked Kassel as the place to announce themselves. When I asked this, one of my Rosicrucian hosts remarked that the area was a *kraftpunk*, a "power spot". Having been

to more than one already on my forteen travels – Monte Verita in Switzerland (FT240:76–78) and Cassadaga in Florida (FT270:74–76), for example – I was willing to keep an open mind. The area did seem to have a magical character – it's deeply associated with German Romanticism – and this sense of being in a rather unusual place was strengthened when I was treated to a tour of the city's most impressive attraction, the Hercules Octagon, rising over the fantastic Wilhelmshöhe Park.

Both the Octagon and the Park are examples of a fusion between a late Renaissance and Baroque fascination with mechanical devices, especially waterworks, and an early Romantic love of nature and ruins, expressed in the 18th-century obsession with architectural follies. Wilhelmshöhe Park (named after Landgrave Wilhelm IX, 1743–1821; 'Wilhelmshöhe' means 'Wilhelm's height') spreads out over a huge area: 590 acres or 2.4 sq km, making it the largest hillside park in Europe. According to the art historian Georg Dehio, it is the "most grandiose combination of landscape and architecture the Baroque ever dared". Work on it began in 1696, under the rule of



Emperor needed the Landgrave to defeat Louis XIV. The fauns, centaurs, gods, goddesses, and other figures from Classical mythology that populate the monument suggest that the heroic demigod is just as much a sign that the Landgrave was a fan of the Renaissance 'pagan revival'.

Indeed, the *Wasserspiel*, or 'water play' that the Hercules Monument is famous for, is inspired by the spectacular Water Theatre of the Villa Aldobrandini in Frascati, Italy, one of the grandest examples of what the scholar Joscelyn Godwin calls "the pagan dream of the Renaissance". But Germany (or its 17th-century equivalent) had its own 'pagan dream' built of gardens and fountains. Perhaps the most spectacular were those at the Heidelberg castle of Frederick V, the Elector Palatine of the Rhine. Frederick was a devotee of the esoteric sciences and at his castle the architect Simon de Caus constructed an assortment of 'water

organs' and 'singing fountains', set in fantastic artificial grottos and gardens, decorated with occult and mythological designs. Frances Yates argues that Frederick was tipped as a viable contender against Habsburg rule, and that the Rosicrucian manifestos were designed to drum up support for him. Sadly, he was defeated in 1620 at the disastrous Battle of White Mountain, in what is now the Czech Republic. In the Thirty Years War that followed, his fantastic gardens were destroyed; but half a century later, Landgrave Karl revived the tradition.

From the jagged rocks below the Hercules Monument, arranged to simulate a naturally formed crag, some 350,000 litres (92,000 gallons) of water – or about 1,200 bath tubs full, as the guide book says – are released in a massive waterfall. This flows down the 220m (720ft)-long artificial cascades to the Neptune Pool at the base, so named for the trident-bearing Roman god who sits waiting below in

ABOVE: An old postcard shows the spectacular waterfall feature descending from the Hercules Octagon.

his grotto. The water, which moves in a single flow, also serves the aqueduct, the Steinhoffer Falls, the *Teufelsbrücke*, and the other water displays throughout the park, and is driven by the same means as when it was first released on 3 June 1714. The whole system works by natural pressure, without pumps or hydraulic devices, with water collected in reservoirs from springs, rainfall, and melting snow; no modern 'improvements' have been added. Some 6,000 cubic metres (1,585,000 gallons) of water, flowing over a large central cascade, flanked by two narrower ones, takes about 15 minutes to reach the Giant's Head Pool, so named for a rock formation at its centre that is supposed to be the head of a giant defeated by Hercules, and which releases a powerful jet of water. Further down, near the *Schloss Wilhelms Höhe*, the display finishes when the water, having reached it through a series of underground pipes, suddenly bursts through the surface of the artificial lake to create a fountain 52m (170ft) high.

As I stood with my Rosicrucian friends and watched the flow begin, someone mentioned that the course of the water was supposedly designed to mirror the body's chakras, those spiritual centres of energy said to be aligned along the spine. Possible, I thought – but at that moment I was more attentive to the mesmerising flow of the water itself, and to the many children who, perched on the tip of each cascade, waited till the last second before leaping off, to avoid getting drenched. It was a remarkable display, and I was very lucky to see it; it was the last of the season and after this, the valves would be shut until the following May. Chakras or not, watching the smooth, glass-like flow glide over the broad steps was a meditation in itself, and when the jet-spray suddenly emerged from the Giant's Head, like the rest of the crowd I let out a gasp of delight. No neon lights, no CGI, no 3D or High-Definition. Just water, stone, sunlight, and an old-school delight in marvels and magic. The original Rosicrucians may have been invisible – although the flesh and blood ones I met on this trip were quite charming – but the wonder their ideas inspired simply can't be missed. **FT**

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GARY LACHMAN is a regular *FT* contributor and writes on popular culture, philosophy and the occult. His biography of Madame Blavatsky is out this year.

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Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

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He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature

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14TH JANUARY 1941:
THE BBC BROADCASTS
TO OCCUPIED EUROPE,
SUGGESTING THAT
ALL RESISTANCE
FIGHTERS SHOULD
ADOPT THE "V" SIGN,
STANDING FOR
VICTORY IN FRENCH
AND FREEDOM
IN FLEMISH...



BY JUNE, THE BBC
HAS BEGUN TO USE
THE MORSE CODE
SIGN FOR "V"—
DOT-DOT-DOT-DASH—
FOR ALL THEIR
OVERSEAS
TRANSMISSIONS.
ACROSS THE
CONTINENT PEOPLE
START TO CLAP,
WHISTLE, STAMP
OR CLATTER THE
CODE...



...WHICH IS
IDENTICAL TO THE
OPENING NOTES OF
BEETHOVEN'S
FIFTH SYMPHONY!

IT'S OK BY ME!
THIS HITLER CREEP
IS A DISGRACE TO
GERMANY... AND I
CAN'T HEAR IT
ANYWAY...



19TH JULY 1941—
CHURCHILL
OFFICIALLY
BACKS THE
V-CAMPAIGN,
AND STARTS
MAKING THE
V-SIGN AS HIS
PERSONAL
TRADEMARK...
THOUGH AT FIRST
HE GETS IT
THE WRONG
WAY AROUND...



SAME
TO YOU,
CHEEKY
BLEEDER!

SO—
WHO IS THE
MASTERMIND
BEHIND THIS
GREAT
CAMPAIGN?



YOO—
HOO!
ME
AGAIN!

IS THERE ANY TRUTH IN
CROWLEY'S BOAST?
PERHAPS...



AS EARLY AS JANUARY 31ST,
CROWLEY HAD BEEN SAYING
THAT IT WAS HE, THE
BEAST, WHO HAD COME
UP WITH THE V-SIGN, AND
HAD SUGGESTED THE
CAMPAIGN TO NAVAL
INTELLIGENCE...



...WHO
IN TURN
PASSED IT
ON TO THE
BBC!

HE CLAIMED THE 'V'
SYMBOL WAS BASED
ON VVVVV—THE
MOTTO HE ADOPTED
IN 1909—FROM THE
HORNS OF THE
CAPRICORN GOAT...



IN SHORT, HE HAD SHOWN
THE BRITISH HOW TO
SLAP A MAGICKAL CURSE
ON THE NAZIS!



ODDLY, THE
NAZIS KNEW
ALL ABOUT
CROWLEY!
ONE OF LORD
HAW-HAW'S
GAGS WAS
ABOUT HIM
PERFORMING
A BLACK MASS
IN ST. PAULS...

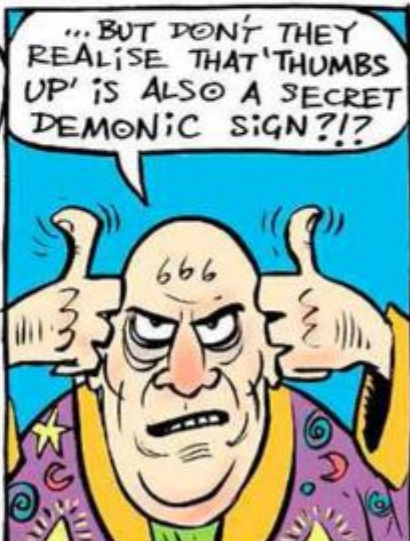


IT'S THE WAY
I TELL'EM...

AND EVEN MORE
STRANGE, SOME
HIGH-RANKING
BRITISH OFFICERS
SENT LETTERS
OF THANKS TO
CROWLEY FOR
A PAMPHLET HE
PUBLISHED, CALLED
'THUMBS UP'
ABOUT THE
V-SIGN! THE
BEAST WAS
MOVED TO TEARS!



IT WAS THE
LEAST I
COULD DO...



...BUT DON'T THEY
REALISE THAT 'THUMBS
UP' IS ALSO A SECRET
DEMONIC SIGN?!

COMING NEXT MONTH



WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT

A POLTERGEIST OUTBREAK IN
SEVENTIES ENGLAND



CHARLES FORT'S POLT HOW THE ANOMALIST'S LONDON SOJOURN TURNED SPOOKY



**MIND-CONTROL,
MERIT AND MAGIC,
MYSTERY ISLAND,
AND MUCH MORE...**

FORTEAN TIMES 293

ON SALE 13 SEPT

RANKIN



HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

SEPTEMBER 1982

One evening, Mrs Pauline Reidy stepped out of her Burbank, Illinois, home to check her car, and there heaped on her front steps was a small drift of snow about 3ft by 3ft (90x90cm). It was a cool evening, but snow wasn't expected; certainly not in such a small, highly localised quantity. She studied it for signs "it might have fallen from a plane", but it was clean; nor was there any indication it had been dumped by a prankster; but she reported it anyway. Fort would have enjoyed clipping such a datum.

FT53:15

Another obliquely reported incident came to us via Janet and Colin Bord. Two friends of theirs were walking on a path between two fields outside Rearsby, Leicestershire. "It was nearly dark, the sky overcast with a slash of orange sunset over Charnwood," they told the Bords. There was "a very cold wind, then, for a split second, we both felt a warm breeze on our faces". They looked about for a source for the unexpected phenomenon, but could find none. "We both agreed that had we been alone we would not have trusted our own senses."

The Bords asked *FT* readers for a possible explanation, but no one replied. The only observation I can make is that the region around Leicester has produced a fat folder's worth of fortean phenomena, much of it the subject of a major study by Paul Devereux and Andrew York in **FT11** and **FT12** (our first ever big article). The authors noted: "It is not a forest of trees and probably never was a forest in any real sense. It is referred to in *Domesday* as a 'waste'." They describe it as a "remarkable area" with "a weird, primæval atmosphere" the result "of ancient volcanic action", through which runs the Thringstone Fault. **FT38:59**

SEPTEMBER 1992

As war reparations go, this must rank among the oddest. South Korea asked Japan to return some 20,000 noses taken by the Japanese military when they invaded Korea in 1597, and the Japanese parliament agreed. Kim Moon-gil, professor of Japanese history at Pusan University of Foreign Studies, said he had been given permission to excavate the noses at the *Senbitsuka* – 'the thousand-nose tomb' – near

the Japanese town of Bizen in Okayama prefecture. Four centuries ago, the Japanese commander had ordered the beheading of Korean generals and for ears to be lopped off soldiers and civilians – but later changed that to noses instead of ears – and the cargo of conks was shipped to Japan. They were to be reburied in Cholla province in a big ceremony attended by hundreds of monks from both countries. **FT67:10**

SEPTEMBER 2002

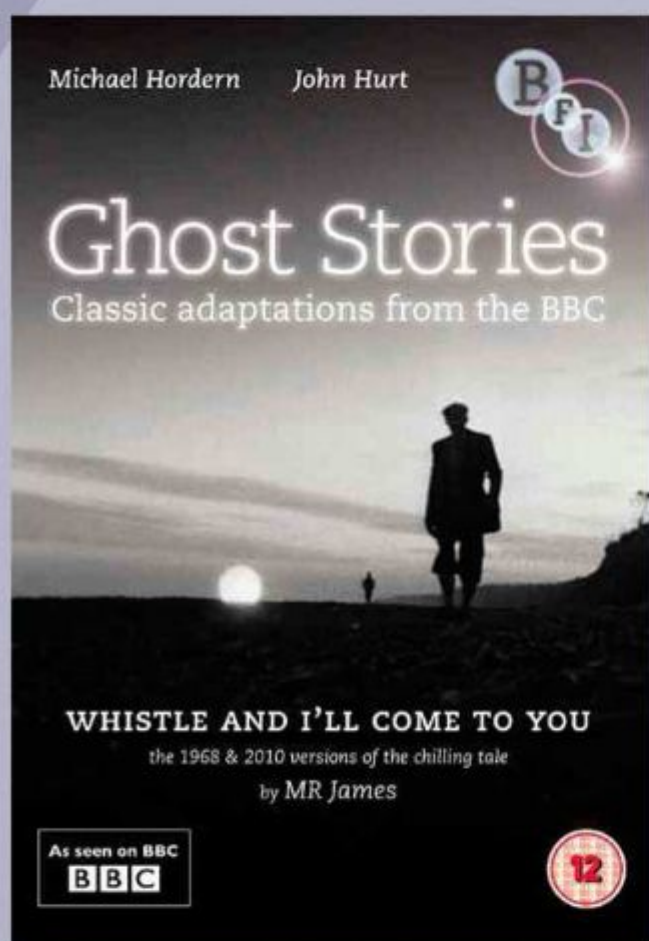
A small sloping shaft in Khufu's Great Pyramid at Giza has puzzled archæologists ever since it was discovered in 1872. Around mid-month, a team backed by *National Geographic* sent a robot up the small 8in/20cm-square shaft to drill through the solid door that blocked its end. The event was beamed live by Fox TV to a room packed with some of the world's leading archæologists, while Dr Zahi Hawass (then director of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities) provided a live commentary. As the probe's drill broke through the limestone block, the general expectation of a treasure-filled chamber that had not been seen for around 2,500 years was dashed. When the dust cleared, there was another slab of stone blocking the way. This second obstacle had to wait until 2011 until it, too, was pierced by a camera probe, revealing only a tiny chamber with a few hieroglyphs painted in red on its floor. **FT165:22**

Thousands of people trekked to the top of the Had Sai waterfall in Thailand's Pungna province to view what the *Kao Sod* newspaper called, rather disingenuously, "a puddle". The water-filled indentation has taken the approximate shape of a human foot – a type of simulacrum sometimes called 'Buddha's Footprint'.

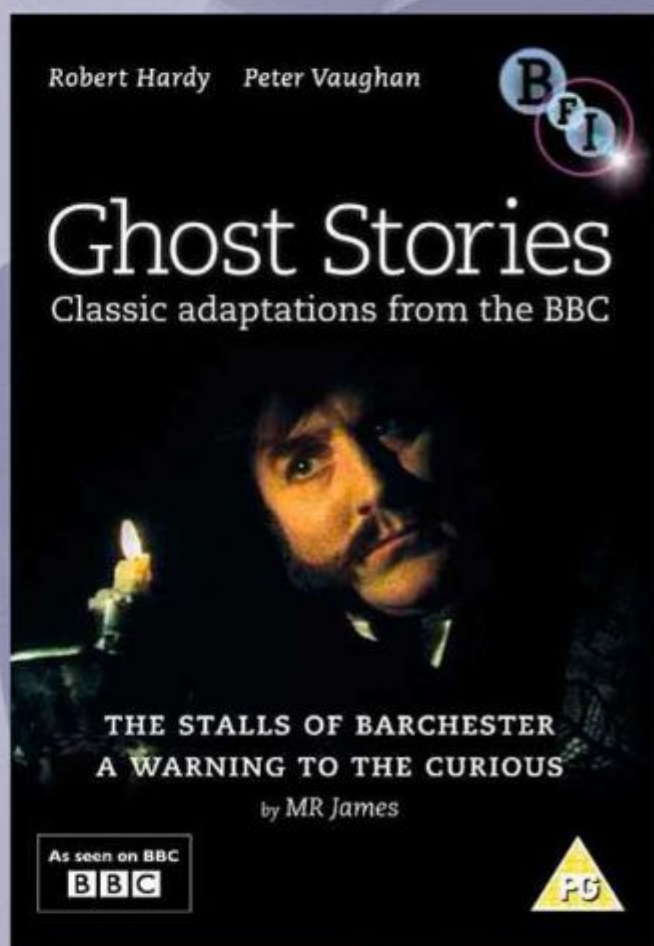
Pilgrims leave incense, flowers and candles around the holy indentation and believe that the water (whether drunk or applied is not said) will relieve pain and bring good fortune. Wasting no opportunity, they also pray to a frog that they believe has come to guard the site, asking it for luck in the monthly lottery. The paper reported that the frog seemed close to death as many people had tried rubbing talcum powder into its skin in the hope of revealing the winning numbers. **FT166:12**



TERRIFYING TALES



WHISTLE AND I'LL COME TO YOU
(1968 & 2010 VERSIONS)

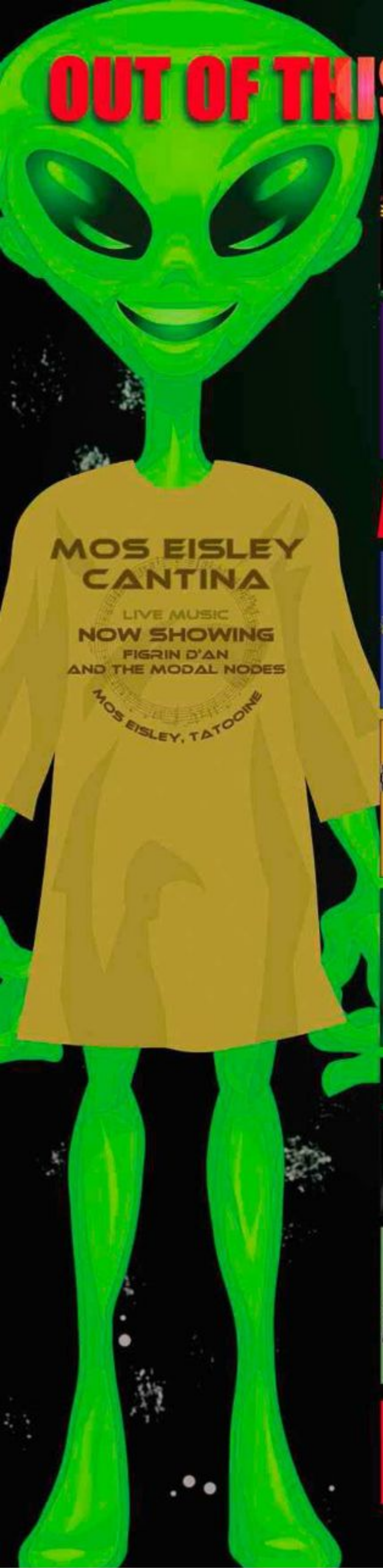


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